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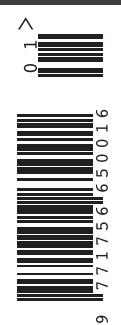
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Hello!



And welcome back! I hope you all had a wonderful, restful break, and are feeling refreshed and ready for spring. There is light at the end of that winter tunnel, but while the days remain dark and cold, we've got plenty of advice, resources, and ideas for you to dig into.

One of the enduring talking points throughout the education sector, no matter the time of year, is budget. Last year was no different, and the government even announced a new programme to try and help schools get more bang for their buck. The Maximising Value for Pupils scheme (MVP) launched in December, and claims to be a framework that will allow schools to band together to direct their budgets more efficiently. If the new year has brought with it plenty of questions around how to best organise your purchasing processes, and try and get more out of your budget, head over to page 33 to see our leadership special, all about the dos and don'ts of procurement.

For those looking to upgrade their classroom practice, the tool of the moment is of course AI. There are so many wonderful things that these LLM platforms can do, but they also come with their own set of pitfalls. To learn how you can save yourself time in your planning, without falling into some of the more common AI traps, take a look at Anna Fannon's breakdown of prompt-writing for teaching on page 38.

Another New Year tradition, of course, is healthy eating, so if you're currently trying to get your five-a-day without descending into sticking your head in the biscuit tin by 3pm, why not try out Ellie Chettle Cully's six-week French unit on tasting fruits and giving opinions? Educational and delicious. Check it out on page 20.

Thanks so much for reading, and remember, if you have resources you'd love to share, a burning question, or a request for particular teaching materials, drop me a line at charley.rogers@theteachco.com

Until next time,

Charley

Charley Rogers, editor
 @TeachPrimaryEd1  @charleytp.bsky.social

Don't miss our next issue, available from 23rd February

POWERED BY...



KIRSTY RUTHVEN
shares ideas and activities for addressing misogynistic myths in the classroom

"Leaving discussions until secondary school is a vitally missed opportunity"

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KENNY PRIMROSE
on how to bring the wonder back into teaching and learning – for you and your pupils

"Awe is one of the most profound and formative gifts of education"

p29



KARL MCGRATH
explains how coding lessons are more than just digital skills, and can change the way you teach

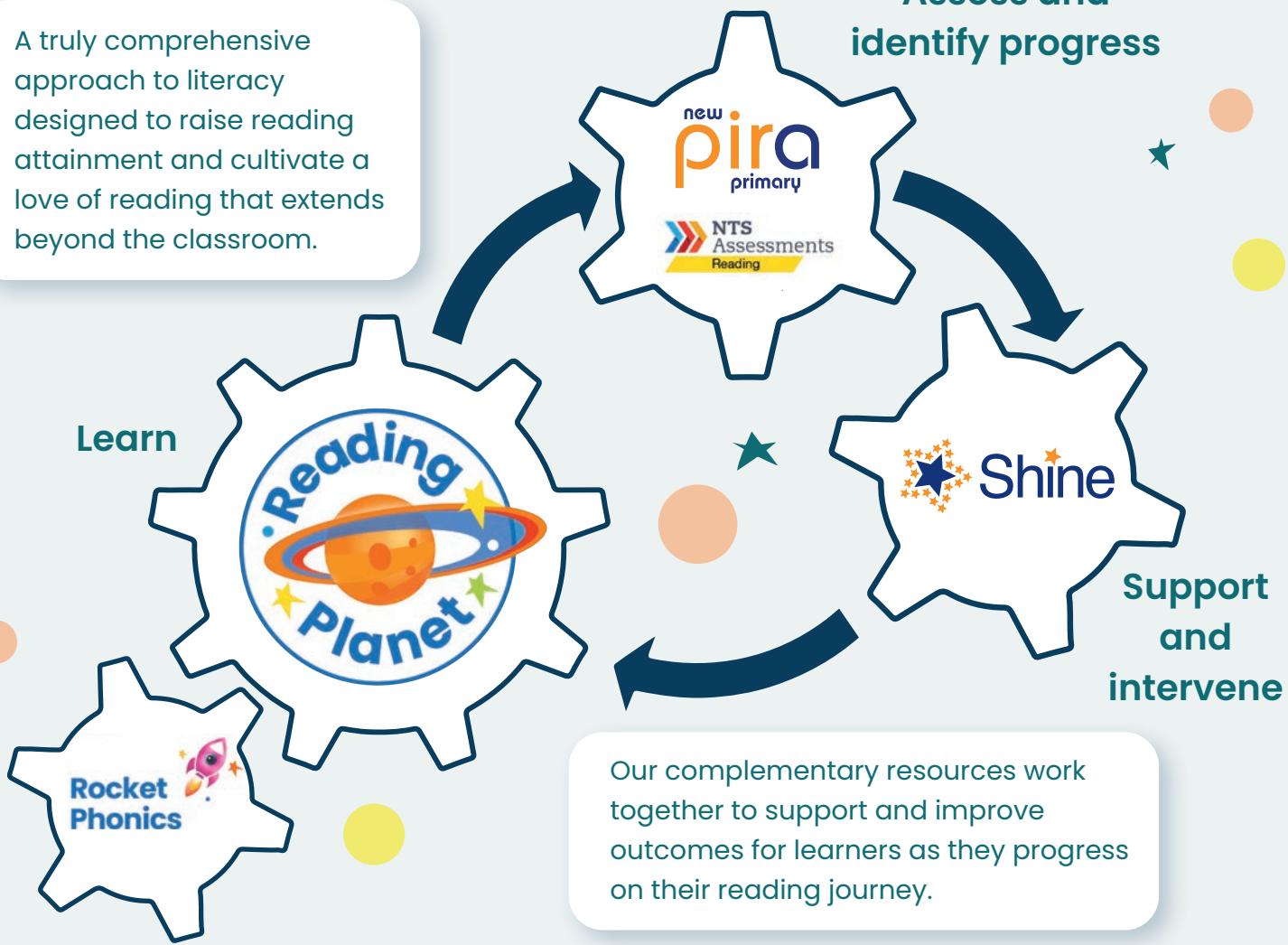
"Coding becomes a form of reasoning rather than a set of digital skills"

p43



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We're all ears!

We want to make sure our magazine is a brilliant resource for teachers and are always striving to improve. We love hearing from real teachers about what they liked and what they would change. Got feedback about this issue? Contact us via the details in the yellow box below – we'd love to hear from you!

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We want to hear from you!

Get in touch with your rants, comments, photos and ideas.



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†AI - Image modified with AI assistance



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— THE LAST DAYS OF — **POMPEII**

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Breaktime

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Evidence into action

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) has announced eight new local 'Evidence into Action' partnerships, supporting 223 schools. Including efforts to reach 'hidden disadvantage' in small schools located in coastal and rural areas, the partnerships are taking place across England. Each partnership will address a specific challenge facing disadvantaged pupils in the local area by using evidence-based teaching practices that researchers have found to boost children's learning in rigorous studies, trials or evaluations. Running over two years, the programme is led by an EEF-supported research school and local education leaders.

Chris Patterson, director of impact at EEF said:

"We know that small schools in rural areas and coastal communities often face challenges in accessing professional development opportunities. So, some of the new partnerships are working to provide training in a different way to reach these schools."

"Other initiatives focus on boosting children's attainment in key areas needing attention, such as maths or reading. The EEF is proud to be collaborating with local experts who know their communities, to support young people's learning and life chances."

Read more at tinyurl.com/tp-EEFregional

3 INSTANT LESSONS... (You're welcome)



SEE THE WORLD

Let's Go See has launched a series of free cartoons for KS1 and KS2, exploring different parts of the world and its history, including the Amazon Rainforest, New York, and Ancient Rome. Watch all videos for free at letsgosee.world or search Let's Go See on YouTube.



AI GUIDE

A cyber security expert at Loughborough University has created an A-to-Z picturebook to introduce children to AI. Aimed at pupils aged 5-11, the book uses engaging illustrations and simple text to introduce readers to cyber concepts from an early age. View and download your free copy at aiatozbook.com



POSITIVE PLAY

Premier League Primary Stars has released a set of five short, flexible activities that combine football and gaming, using skill games from EA SPORTS FC 26 to spark pupils' interest and support their development of football, life, and leadership skills. Read more and get your resources at tinyurl.com/tp-PositivePlay



Our magazines need you!

Do you have a lesson plan or MTP to share with our readers? Or some tried-and-tested resources that your pupils love? We're looking for new contributors to *Teach Reading & Writing* and *Teach Primary* magazines - maybe that's you?! Email lydia.grove@theteachco.com to find out more.



The Jolly Postman – 40 years on

This year marks four decades since the publication of Janet and Allan Ahlberg's *The Jolly Postman*, and to celebrate, The Postal Museum has announced the

first ever exhibition dedicated to the classic book.

Opening on 14 February 2026, this immersive, family-friendly exhibition will invite visitors to follow the Jolly Postman's delivery round through a fairytale neighbourhood. Throughout, they'll find original artwork from the Ahlberg archives, much of it never before displayed publicly. The museum is also launching a national schools competition, inviting children to create their own fairytale mail. Pupils can draw pictures inspired by *The Jolly Postman* or write letters about why they like the book, with a chance to be included in a museum display if posted before 26 Feb.

For more information, and to enter, visit tinyurl.com/tp-PMjolly

Marathon support

The National Association for Special Educational Needs (nasen) has announced that Jake Gurney, a dedicated primary school teacher from Luton, will be representing the charity as its first-ever runner in the 2026 TCS London Marathon.

Jake previously completed the 2024 London Marathon, raising £1,200 for Luton Foodbank, and took part in the 2025 London Landmarks Half Marathon in support of Tommy's. Now Jake is once again taking on the 26.2-mile challenge – this time to raise vital funds to support inclusive education across the UK. He says: "As a primary school teacher, I've experienced the changing needs of children first-hand. nasen has supported several of our families, working alongside us to provide the best possible support for both children and parents. In one particular case, it was invaluable to have experts who guided us through the process." To learn more about Jake's journey, and to support his fundraising, visit [justgiving.com/campaign/teammassen](https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/teammassen)



30% of pupils with SEND have speech and language challenges*

Look ahead | Book ahead

Number Day 2026

NUMBER DAY
Number Day returns for its 26th year on

Friday 6 February 2026, all set to help show pupils the fun side of maths. Sign up for hundreds of free resources and a chance to fundraise for the NSPCC at tinyurl.com/tp-NumberDay26

NATIONAL STORYTELLING WEEK

Running from 2 to 8 February with FREE online events on 3 and 4 February, the annual celebration is back with a theme of 'Soundtrack your story'. Find out more and sign up for free resources at tinyurl.com/tp-NSW2026



Q & A



Ade Adepitan

Athlete and broadcaster

1. What was primary school like for you?

It was fun. Primary school's great, because it's where learning is designed to be really engaging for young people. Everything gets a bit more serious in secondary. I remember us having an early BBC computer in my classroom, and we had a game all about the Mary Rose, because at the time, the ship was being raised. I still remember a load of the facts – and that must have been 40 years ago. Proof of the impact of that early education.

2. What are some of your favourite projects that you've worked on?

A little while ago I did a series of documentaries for the BBC about climate change, and we condensed them into shorter episodes for BBC Bitesize. I'm really proud of those, and I still get teachers and those who were children at the time, stopping me on the street or getting in touch via social media to tell me that they learned a lot, or found the films useful in their teaching. So I feel really privileged that I've had the chance to be a part of these children's learning.

3. What would you like teachers to know about Race Across the Continent?

It's a really fun geography game from BBC Bitesize, aimed at 7-11-year-olds. Players race their hot air balloons across the globe by answering questions on human geography, the natural world and geography skills. It's a combination of a quiz and a competition, and at the end of it, children will have learned a lot, but won't feel as though they've been through a long, arduous lesson. It's stealth learning at its best – and children can see a tangible progression in their knowledge, as every time they get a question right, they move further forward in the race.

Race Across the Continent is available for free now, at tinyurl.com/tp-BBCgeographyrace

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6 ways to stop parents feeling left out

When families are genuinely included, children's learning flourishes – so make sure every interaction counts

1 | FOCUS ON MORE THAN OUTCOMES

If a pupil suddenly stops handing in homework or has been misbehaving in maths lessons, their parents might typically get an email to let them know their child has had three behaviour alerts this week. But receiving that kind of message out of the blue can leave families feeling excluded, worried or defensive, without fully understanding the circumstances leading up to the sanction. A more proactive approach, where you reach out personally before the email alert is raised, can help parents and carers feel more involved in the process, and more supported to nip problems in the bud.

2 | SHARE USEFUL DETAIL

When parents understand more about what's behind a child's behaviour, they're in a stronger position to help. A teacher might have noticed a child becomes disruptive in literacy lessons, particularly after being asked to read aloud. Sharing that detail gives parents valuable context. It can spark more meaningful conversations, which might reveal that the pupil struggles to express themselves vocally, both in school and at home. Teachers and families can then explore next steps together to address vocabulary gaps, with some extra support to build the child's confidence, or referral to a speech and language specialist.

3 | COMMUNICATE WITHOUT OVERLOADING

Information overload can quickly switch parents off. Regular updates can be valuable, but when messages pile up, it becomes harder to get to what's important. Schools can avoid this by focusing on quality over quantity when it comes to emails and texts. The goal is to keep families informed and included without overwhelming them. School systems can be set up to send information out automatically, but it's important to avoid generic messages that may come across as impersonal or irrelevant, causing parents to lose interest.



EDWARD FARMILO

is a former teacher, and senior leader for education at VenturEd Solutions.

4 | ASK HOW FAMILIES WANT TO RECEIVE INFORMATION

Some families appreciate regular updates about their child's reading or reminders about upcoming school trips via a mobile app. Others prefer a weekly email to keep them up to date. Because parents' preferences vary, it's worth asking what kind of information they find useful, and how they'd like to receive it. A short survey at the start of the year can help a school make sure its communication strategy gives parents information in the way they want it, to help them support learning effectively and stay engaged. Provide a defined list of options rather than asking an open-ended question, to prevent decision overload and to make sure you're only offering options that are practical and sustainable for the school.

5 | REMOVE BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT

It isn't always easy for parents to fully engage in their child's education. Behind every missed parents' evening could be a family juggling multiple jobs to afford the next school trip. Schools can help by offering flexible meeting times, informal chats in the playground or virtual catchups when face-to-face meetings aren't possible. Small adjustments like these can make a real difference to how included parents feel and help them to stay involved.

6 | MAINTAIN REGULAR TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

Keeping parents informed is important, but meaningful engagement develops over time. Instead of a one-way flow of updates, create opportunities throughout the year for parents to share insights about their child, ask questions and work with teachers to support learning. With regular, meaningful dialogue, parents feel part of the school community and children get the support they need.



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Apparently, we're poisoning our children...

Farage's 'war' against unions could just be a bark with no bite, but the potential damage is very real...

Brace yourselves, schools, Nigel Farage has declared Reform UK will "go to war against the teachers' unions... they are poisoning our kids... dividing us, not uniting us. They are feeding this negative culture" (tinyurl.com/tp-GuardianNEUReform). Pot / Kettle! This is dog-whistle politics from a world-class disruptor, designed to appeal to those who already hear him and keep stirring the bubbling pot of discontent.

Why does this matter to schools? Because current opinion polls show Farage on track to be the next Prime Minister, albeit the next election is four years away. Of course, before then we might have been wiped out by a giant asteroid. Swings and roundabouts.

To be fair (though Farage sees no need), slanging matches are a two-way street. The general secretary of the NEU said Farage, "would be a disaster for education and children". Richard Tice, Reform's deputy leader, understandably complained when staff at the Orion group of academies in London used a

picture of him to illustrate 'extremism' – defined as activities which 'reject British Values'.

Interestingly, the polling organisation, YouGov, found that in the 2024 general election Reform UK 'did significantly better amongst those with a lower level of education' (tinyurl.com/tp-YouGov2024ed). Maybe they're just planning to knacker education to maintain their vote?

In my own experience – actually having worked in schools for 40 years as opposed to just chatting bollocks about them down the boozer – teachers are studiously even-handed when discussing politics, or steer clear of it altogether, having a legal duty to be impartial (sections 406-407 of the 1996 Education Act, if you're interested? No, I thought not.) Many politicians (not just Farage) might struggle to comprehend impartiality, let alone practise it.

Farage has successfully cultivated the image of a no-nonsense, straight-talking, good old boy from your local to whom facts are disposable.

If you were stood next to him in your local you'd move. Move pub, probably. Brazenly, in spite of his privately educated stockbroker millionaire background, he rails against the 'metropolitan elite' as though he is neither metropolitan nor elite.

It's magnificent politics, and you have to take off your flat cap to how brilliantly he does it. Supporters lap up things like his airily dismissive response to questions from respected journalist, Mishal Husseini; "Listen love, you're trying ever so hard" (tinyurl.com/tp-BloombergFarage). He has taken the liberal slur of 'male, pale and stale' as a badge of honour and found there are votes in it.

Importantly, Farage speaks fluent human, in stark contrast to Badenoch and Starmer, who orate like overly detailed training videos on the best way to wash paint dry. If he were in *Celebrity Traitors* (he's already done *Big Brother*) the others would be banished or killed in short order.

But as to teachers purportedly telling children to be ashamed of our country, when was the last time Reform had anything positive to say about it? Where are the visions of hope, the sunlit uplands, the Brave New World? The truth is, populists rely on perpetuating a fiction of a Britain that has gone to the dogs in order to foment the discontent that might see them elected.

Reform have said little about education beyond the above declaration of war. Their 2024 manifesto promised a ban on transgender ideology in schools, 20 per cent tax relief on private school fees, and the introduction of a 'patriotic' curriculum. But what does that mean? DT – how to affix flags to lamp posts (more able extension activity – how to fix them the right way up); MFL – none of that, love, speak English or go home; mathematics – how to make random promises of expenditure and tax cuts add up; science – return to English Newtonian physics (none of this Einstein relativity nonsense, far too German); art – cancelled. Too woke; music – appreciation of the dog whistle; English – too bloody right, love, and proud of it.

Ultimately, the trouble with disruptors is that that is all they're good at. Stirring up disaffection is all very well until, inevitably, faced with actually solving problems in government rather than simply complaining about them in opposition, the disaffection turns on you. Watch this space. **TP**

Kevin Harcombe is former headteacher of Redlands Primary, Fareham.

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Each issue we ask a contributor to pen a note they would love to send

A letter to... the education secretary

The dreaded weekly spelling test is causing serious self-esteem issues for pupils across the country... and for what purpose, asks **Dan Batchelor**



As we all know, neurodiverse children are becoming increasingly recognised in the classroom, along with our understanding of their needs. We spend hours differentiating lessons, creating accessible resources, and prioritising children's wellbeing (rightly so). Yet, with spelling tests, we are stuck in the past. So why do them?

I am dyslexic (diagnosed at 17). I hated the weekly spelling test as a child, and as a teacher, I hate putting my pupils through it. The more time I have spent thinking about the issue, the more I have realised it isn't about being dyslexic at all. It's about what the tests actually stand for. A child can be creative and write for different purposes, yet at the end of Year 6, part of the final judgement of seven years of learning comes down to 20 random spellings.

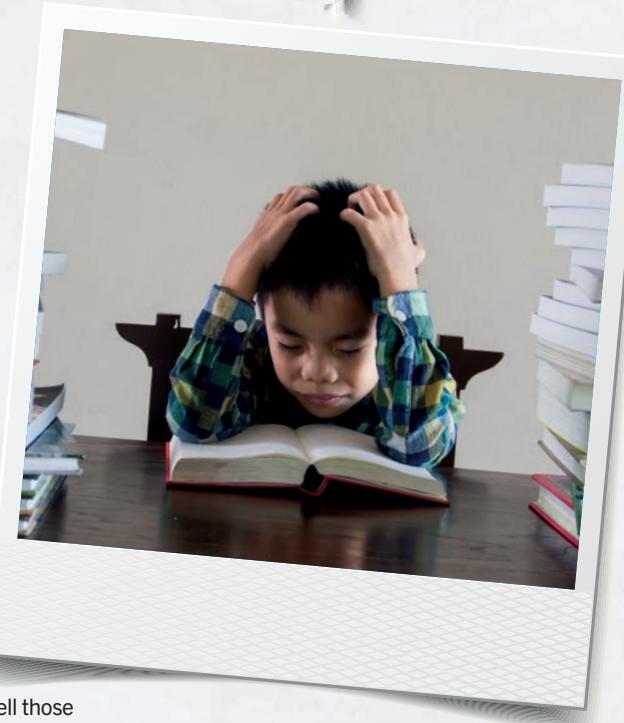
Before attempting to list the reasons why spelling tests shouldn't exist without rambling, I want to make it clear: I'm not saying spelling is pointless, just the tests (unless you are in a spelling bee). I'm also not saying spelling shouldn't be taught and practised – it's important to be able to recognise and correctly use homophones, prefixes, suffixes, and changing word classes, and so on. I'm simply saying a child's final outcome shouldn't be judged against a test, and children shouldn't be made to sit through it.

As someone who is dyslexic, I never felt more stupid at school than during the weekly test. I would practise and still do "terribly".

Furthermore, if you asked me to spell those random words a week later, I would do even worse. So, my first question is: if the information isn't retained, what is the point? Not only this, but I also have an identical twin (cue the violin), who happened to be very good at spelling. I always compared myself to him, which only lowered my self-esteem and confidence even more. Now, not everyone is a twin, but we can all relate to comparing ourselves to those around us. Why have something in place that can do that to a child's self-esteem?

“Rather than making children feel stupid, we should make them feel supported”

Everyone knows dyslexia isn't a lack of effort or intelligence; it's just a learning difference. It can even be a strength: many dyslexic people are incredibly creative thinkers, strong visual learners, and great problem-solvers. Not only am I a teacher, but I also have a published book. I don't say this to make it about me; I say this because, as an eight-year-old staring at "3/10" on my weekly test, I never would have thought this possible. Why? Because I believed that to be a good writer, you needed to be a good speller. Little did I know, dyslexia wasn't the barrier; my perception of what a writer should be was.



In today's world, there's so much support available, yet we send children into a spelling test blind. We wouldn't do that in any other aspect of learning. Rather than making children feel stupid, we should make them feel supported. Why put barriers in front of a six-year-old? No wonder so many children are put off reading and writing for pleasure.

Rather than putting up obstacles, we should be removing them with tools that are now readily available, such as typing or voice-to-text. There needs to be a systematic change. I believe the emphasis should be taken off spelling and placed on reading and creative writing, whilst making learning accessible and relevant.

So, back to my original question: why do we still do spelling tests? As long as spelling remains part of the SATs, we are setting children up to fail by not practising them. But by maintaining these tests, that is exactly what we are doing for dyslexic children (statistically, likely to be 1 in 5 pupils). We wouldn't put children through this in a PE lesson, nor for any other neurodiversity. So why is it that we haven't moved forward with spelling? How is it that 20 random spellings go towards the final judgement of a child's learning?

Time in schools is precious. Let's remove the dreaded tests and use that time to help progress, not create unwanted stress for children.

From,

Dan

*Dan Batchelor is a primary school teacher and author. His first novel, *Jack Palmer: A New Order* (£10.99, Cranthorpe Millner Publishers), is out now.*

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UNDERCOVER TEACHER

Our anonymous educator gets something off their chest

When you love your job deeply, recognising when it's hurting you can be hard – but it's essential to keep a grip on life outside school...

These days I'm mostly a therapist. That's where the heart of my week is now – holding space for clients who are teetering on the edge I once knew too well. But I haven't cut the cord completely. I still do supply days when it feels manageable, still walk into schools, still get that familiar rush of affection when the bell rings. The difference is I choose those days now, and I leave when the bell goes at the end of the day, instead of letting the job seep into every corner of my life.

Teaching was never 'just a job' for me. It was a calling, a purpose, a role that demanded every emotional fibre I had. And for a time, I gave it, willingly. The pride, the connection, the tiny everyday miracles – those moments still matter to me. But alongside all that beauty was the part many teachers never talk about openly: the quiet internal crumbling. When you love your job deeply, it becomes even harder to recognise when it's hurting you. That's the trap so many of us fall into.

I know burnout from the inside out. I've had the Sunday-evening stomach knot that arrives before lunch is finished; the guilt that you're somehow letting everyone down even when you're running on fumes; the way 30 children's emotions can flood the room until there's no oxygen left for your own. I've stared at an endless to-do list and felt genuine panic, come home hollow and taken it out on the people I love most. For a lot of teachers, the constant noise, the fluorescent lights, the relentless task-switching and social demands can feel like a physical assault long before the emotional weight even lands.

And it isn't just 'being tired'. It's the hypervigilance, the sensory overload, the never-ending pressure to perform, to care, to hold everyone together while you're quietly falling apart. It's the emotional whiplash of being everything to everyone all day long. It's the subtle but crushing message that your own needs should always come

second. Many teachers don't realise how deeply dysregulated they are until the symptoms show up in their bodies – heart palpitations, insomnia, tension that never quite leaves. Burnout creeps in quietly, then takes over everything.

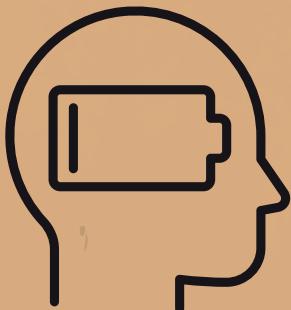
Some of my time now is spent with teachers who sit opposite me, describing the same exhaustion I carried for years. When they talk about the avalanche of admin, the emotional labour nobody clocks you for, the expectation that you'll absorb everyone else's big feelings and still smile – I don't have to imagine it.

I've lived the pressure of being the emotional container for a whole classroom. I know what it's like to hold tears in during lunchtime, to tell yourself "just get through the next hour," to feel your nervous system stretched so thin you're vibrating by three p.m. And I know the heartbreak of realising you've lost parts of yourself along the way – your humour, your creativity, your softness.

I'm proof you don't have to pick between teaching and staying alive. You can step back without disappearing entirely. Supply lets me keep one careful toe in the world I still care about, while therapy lets me help carry the people who are still shouldering the full load.

And the truth is, stepping back gave me a clearer view of the profession than I ever had while inside it. Teacher burnout isn't a personal flaw – it's a systemic issue. Good teachers aren't burning out because they're not strong enough. They're burning out because the demands placed on them are inhuman. And when you add sensitivity, empathy, neurodivergence, trauma histories, and perfectionism into the mix, burnout becomes almost inevitable.

If you're reading this and it hurts to recognise yourself, please hear this: it's not you that's broken. It's the weight. And there are ways to set some of it down – maybe not all at once, maybe just enough to breathe. **TP**



"I know the heartbreak of losing parts of yourself along the way"

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How I do it ➔

Dive into fictional worlds, and encourage reading for pleasure, with character passports

EMILY AZOUELOS



As a starter, place a 'character crate' in the classroom and encourage children to bring in books featuring characters they've enjoyed reading about, or write down the names of the characters on pieces of paper. You can support this by sharing your favourite (child-friendly!) books, or talking about stories you've shared in school. Individually or as a class, gather words to describe the characters children have chosen, and sort them into 'good' and 'bad' lists, encouraging pupils to justify their ideas using evidence from the story where possible.



- Working in groups, ask the children to choose one good and one bad character from a book or the character crate. Produce role-on-the-wall drawings: large outlines drawn around a child's body inside which pupils write personality-related adjectives, with evidence or quotes that help justify why their chosen character is the hero or villain in the story, on the outside. Give time to share their work, look at each group's drawing, and to add in ideas with sticky notes. Ask each child to select one character to focus on for their creative work later.



Now for the character passport. Get the children to sketch out a plan showing where information will go: a box for the character's picture, a personality section, (perhaps including special skills, friends/ enemies, etc), and a space for extras, such as a list of magical abilities, or secret missions. This planning sheet should help them think about the organisation and layout of their work, and how to blend the facts they have discovered with imagination and inference.



Add the visual elements of the passports by choosing colours, borders, symbols, and illustrations that match each character's personality. For example, good characters might use bright tones, soft shades and symbols that convey light and goodness, whereas bad characters might have darker shades or bold shapes. Encourage children to use the pictures in books to carry out research and look for inspiration.



Finally, using their plan and artwork, children will create a character passport booklet. Encourage them to use the following essential ingredients:

- The character's name, including what book they feature in and the author of the book.
- A drawing of the character with their age (estimated if unknown), where they live and species (magical, human etc).
- Strengths and weaknesses.
- A list of allies and rivals of the character.
- Draw and design stamps that they think their character would have earned from their actions in the story (e.g. Bravery stamp, Trickster stamp or Friendship stamp).
- A creative writing section (e.g. a travel log where children can write the places their character has visited in the story).



Emily Azouelos
is an experienced
former primary
teacher, and
educational
content creator.

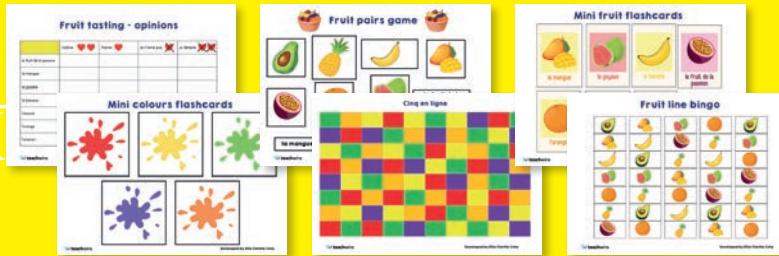
Various studies have shown that fostering an early love of reading, and continuing to develop it throughout childhood, improves mental wellbeing as well as academic outcomes. Creating fun and engaging Reading for Pleasure activities in the classroom will help your pupils to develop deeper comprehension, richer vocabularies, and stronger empathy. It was this goal that inspired this 'character passports' activity, blending children's opinions on books and their key interests, with literacy skills that are essential for learning across the rest of the curriculum.

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WEEK 1

Learning objective

- To recognise and say the names of fruits in French

Teach pupils the names of the seven fruits that appear in the story *Handa's Surprise*, using flashcards to introduce the vocabulary. Draw pupils' attention to some of the trickier graphemes in these words, such as the *an* in *orange* or the *on* in *passion*. Discuss the presence of the silent letter *t* at the end of *l'avocat* or the word *fruit*, and explain that the final *t* in French is usually silent, to help build early phonics awareness and empower pupils to recognise patterns they will encounter again.

Next, play *Loto en ligne* (Line bingo) to attune pupils' ears to the new vocabulary. Give each child a strip

showing a selection of fruits in picture form (you can find templates for all the games mentioned in this unit in the associated download link). Call out fruit names in random order. Pupils should listen for the two fruits from their individual strip: the one at the top and the one at the bottom. Each time one of their fruits is called, they cut or tear off the corresponding picture and continue listening and removing images until none are left. When a pupil has removed all the pictures on their strip, they call out *J'ai gagné!* (I've won!).

Follow this with a round of *Répétez si c'est vrai* (Repeat if it's true), using flashcards that show only fruit images without word prompts. Hold up a fruit and say its name aloud, sometimes correctly and sometimes deliberately using the wrong name. If the name is correct, the class repeats it; if not, they remain silent. This is a great activity for

Bringing language learning to life through practical, hands-on activities – such as food tasting – is an excellent way to engage pupils and develop their confidence in expressing opinions in French. In this unit, pupils taste a range of fruits and use the experience as a springboard for communicating likes and dislikes in the target language. A familiar text, such as a translated version of *Handa's Surprise*, provides a rich stimulus for speaking, listening, reading, and writing tasks centred on children's reactions to different fruits, but this sequence of lessons could be easily adapted to focus on other food items.

encouraging active listening and accurate pronunciation.

If certain fruit names are still proving difficult to pronounce, play *Cherchez la carte* (Find the card). Send one pupil – the seeker – out of the room while you hide a flashcard somewhere in the classroom. When the seeker returns, the rest of the class guides them by repeating the fruit's name, whispering when the seeker is further away from the card and gradually increasing volume as they get closer.

Finally, read *La surprise de Handa* aloud. Encourage pupils to use a simple signal – thumbs up, fingers on noses, or another gesture – whenever they hear a fruit name.



Assessment

Ask children to say a few fruit names aloud after winning *Loto en ligne*. Listen during *Répétez si c'est vrai* to identify any challenging pronunciations and target these during *Cherchez la carte*.



WEEK 2

Learning objective

- To read and write fruit names in French

Begin the session by revisiting the previous week's learning. Use flashcards to review vocabulary, and, if time allows, play one of the games practised last week. Draw pupils' attention to the written forms of the words. Highlight that some nouns begin with *le*, some with *la*, and others with *l'*. Give pupils time in pairs to discuss why these differences might exist, then take suggestions from the class.

Explain that in French, nouns are either masculine or feminine and that the definite article changes accordingly, with *le* denoting masculine nouns and *la* denoting feminine ones.

Using mini flashcards of fruit names, ask pupils to sort the cards into two groups: masculine or feminine. Pupils will soon identify a third group – words beginning with *l'*. Allow a short discussion on this and guide pupils to notice that these nouns all begin with vowels. Clarify that this does not mean they are neutral; they are still either masculine or feminine, but the article becomes *l'* to make pronunciation smoother.

Point out that many – though not all – nouns ending in *e* are feminine.

Give pupils time to reorganise their cards according to this rule.

Because consonant endings are less predictable, simply inform pupils that *l'ananas* and *l'avocat* are masculine, then allow them to adjust their groupings again.

Next, play *Le jeu du mémoire* (pairs). Pupils shuffle their card sets, place them face-down, and take turns turning over two cards to match each fruit picture to its written form. Then play *La fleur* (Flower power). Draw blanks on the board to represent a fruit's name and invite pupils to guess letters – either in English or the target language – to work out the word. Encourage them to use the article (*le*, *la*, or *l'*) as an important clue to narrow down possibilities.

Finish with a short dictation: say a fruit word aloud while pupils write it on their whiteboards, to reinforce listening, spelling, and article recognition.



Assessment

Listen in for pronunciation errors during pairs and use 'show me' boards during the dictation activity to check spellings.



WEEK 3 Learning objective

- To give simple opinions orally in French

Review last week's learning and then introduce pupils to the vocabulary they will need to give opinions: *j'adore* (I love); *j'aime* (I like); *ne n'aime pas* (I don't like) and *je déteste* (I hate). Draw pupils' attention to cognates



(words that look or sound similar in two different languages) and encourage them to draw links between the French and words such as 'adore' and 'detest' in English. Pupils who speak languages other than English may be able to identify additional cognates, so don't forget to give opportunities to discuss this too. Practise this new vocabulary several times using thumbs up high for *j'adore*; a thumbs up at chest height for *j'aime*; a thumbs down at chest height for *je n'aime pas* and, finally, a low thumbs down for *je déteste*.

Explain to pupils that they are going to be trying the fruits that they have learned about in previous lessons and introduce the opinions frame. Allow children time to taste each fruit individually, naming it in French before eating and recording their likes and dislikes. Once completed, ask pupils to share some of their opinions in French, using the opinions frame to guide them.

Finally, introduce *La Bataille* (Battleships) and model how placing a cross in a particular box allows pupils to form an opinion by reading across columns and down rows. Allow pupils time to record their own crosses on the grid before taking turns to guess the location of their partner's crosses aloud, using the opinion phrases. Pupils respond with *oui* (yes) or *non* (no) to indicate whether their partner's guess is correct.



Assessment

Check for pronunciation of opinion vocabulary. Can pupils identify cognates for words such as *déteste* and *j'adore*?



WEEK 4 Learning objective

- To recognise, say and spell the names of colours in French

Introduce pupils to a small range of colours: *rouge* (red), *orange* (orange), *jaune* (yellow), *violet* (purple), and *vert* (green). Spend time highlighting some of the trickier letter combinations that sound different in French than in English, for example the *ou* in *rouge*, the *an* in *orange*, or the *au* in *jaune*. Building on previous learning, ask pupils to identify any silent letters at the ends of words and encourage discussion of the silent *t*, which was taught with the names of fruits. Explain that the letter *e* at the end of French words is also silent, and use echo reading to model correct pronunciation several times.

Use colour flashcards to play *Montrez-moi* (Show me). Pupils work in pairs with the flashcards laid out face-up between them. The teacher calls out "montrez-moi..." followed by a colour, and pupils locate and hold up the correct card as quickly as possible. The activity allows pupils to hear the vocabulary modelled multiple times and supports rapid recognition and pronunciation.

Next, practise orally through *Cing en ligne* (Five in a row). Pupils aim to create a line of five colours – vertically, horizontally, or diagonally – by correctly naming colours in French. On their turn, children point to a coloured square on the grid, say the colour and, if pronounced correctly, write their initial in the box to claim it. In addition





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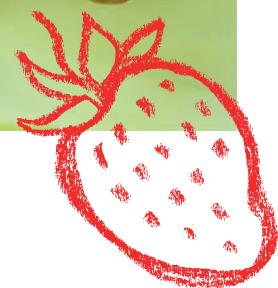
to forming their own lines, pupils need to block their partner from completing theirs. Mixed-ability pairs work best, as more confident pupils can model accurate pronunciation.

End the lesson with writing practice, using *Devinez le mot* (Guess the word). The teacher and each pupil write a colour on a mini whiteboard, keeping it secret. On the count of three, all reveal their boards. Pupils earn a point if their answer matches the teacher's.



Assessment

Check which pupils are consistently choosing the correct colours during the 'Show me' activity. Check spellings on mini whiteboards in the final activity.



WEEK 5

Learning objective

- To give extended opinions orally in French

Recap the names of the fruits that pupils learned at the beginning of the unit. Begin by modelling some opinion sentences on the board and asking the children to read these aloud and translate them into English.

Explain that pupils are going to start extending these sentences by adding in the colour names that they learned in the previous lesson. Model writing some sentences that give an opinion of a particular fruit as well as describing its colour, for example *j'aime la mangue jaune* (I like the yellow mango).

Translate the sentence for pupils and then ask them what they notice about the position of the adjective (the colour) in relation to the noun (the fruit).

Pupils should start to recognise that the adjective comes after the noun, which is not the same as in English. Model with some additional sentences, ensuring that the colour *vert* (green) is not used with any feminine nouns, as this will bring up the issue of adjectival agreement, which pupils have not yet been taught.

Use *La phrase colorée* (Colour the phrase) activity to read aloud some simple sentences. Pupils colour-code the sentences that they hear, and read them aloud at the end of the activity so you can check pronunciation. See the teacher explanation sheet in the associated download for further information on how to run the activity.

Finally, use the speaking and writing frame in the download to scaffold pupils to begin writing and saying their own sentences, extending with *et* (and) and *mais* (but) if they are feeling confident. Play *La trappe* (Trapdoor), asking pupils to use the sentence builder to write a sentence secretly on their whiteboard. Children then work together to guess each other's sentences one column at a time. If they make an error, they must go back to the beginning and try again, until they have guessed the whole sentence.



Assessment

Do children understand adjective noun order? Listen for accurate pronunciation in *La phrase colorée* and circulate to check accuracy of written and oral output during *La trappe*.

children to use their sentence builder to support them to spot the errors and correct them on mini whiteboards. Now is a good time to encourage pupils to begin turning the scaffolds over to make corrections from memory, too. Take feedback on the board and see if the children have managed to spot all the errors.

Model using the sentence builder to create a range of sentences. Allow children time to create their own sentences in their books or, if you have time, by creating a mini book. A range of excellent ideas for how to make and use a range of mini books for writing can be found on MFL teacher Clare Seccombe's blog (tinyurl.com/tp-MFLminibooks). These make excellent pieces for display.



Assessment

Circulate to check written and oral accuracy during *La trappe*. Review final writing for sentence structure understanding. Ask pupils to mark on their written work if they used a scaffold. **TP**



Ellie Chettle Cully is a French teacher and languages and international lead at a Leicester primary.

WEEK 6

Learning objective

- To give extended written opinions in French

Use *La trappe* to recap the learning from last lesson, discussing the position of the adjective after the noun and reviewing how to extend a sentence using *et* (and) or *mais* (but). Explain that pupils are now going to put together everything they have learned to express their opinions about fruits, in writing.

Demonstrate some incorrect sentences on the board and ask the



Expelling MISOGYNY

Prevention is better than cure when challenging gender stereotypes in the classroom, says **Kirsty Ruthven**

AKS2 teacher friend recently raised an interesting point: children don't need to have their own phone to be exposed to misogyny. The examples they gave of behaviours they had witnessed in primary-school-aged children were alarming – all with a common theme of misogynistic viewpoints. It's important to note that while phone ownership by children appears to have caused an upturn in children seeing or sharing inappropriate content or messages (any KS2 teacher will understand the difficulties of the dreaded WhatsApp groups), phones do not seem to be the sole cause for concerning viewpoints. Other teachers have raised the influences of music, wider media, sport, family, and friends as ways to perpetuate or challenge misogynistic myths.

Misogyny – a hatred of, contempt for, or prejudice against women or girls – has been in the spotlight in schools, particularly since the announcement of the new Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) guidelines in England in July 2025. With an increased focus on tackling misogyny, addressing incel culture, and recognising deepfakes at a secondary level, how does this translate to developmentally appropriate action in primary schools? As the RSHE guidance launch states, 'research shows over one in five (22 per cent) of girls aged seven to 10 had seen 'rude images online', and the

average age for exposure to pornography is 13' (tinyurl.com/tp-MisogynyStats). So, leaving discussions until secondary school, as supported by the experiences of friends and colleagues, seems to be a vitally missed opportunity with potentially harmful consequences.

Violence against women and girls is endemic, with a startling number of women murdered or attacked by someone who is close to them (tinyurl.com/tp-VAWGstatsBBC). Of course, this isn't just a women's issue – misogyny harms men too. The State of UK Boys report (tinyurl.com/tp-UKboys) highlights that challenging misogyny, embracing diverse forms of masculinity, and encouraging boys to see women as allies can lead to

better mental health and educational attainment for boys. As a teacher, I often think about the world that we are getting our current pupils ready for, so they can live happy, healthy and fulfilling lives. Sadly, given the data and trends, it seems that we can't leave prejudice, stereotypes, violence and hatred to chance. Instead, there is a

responsibility to tackle misogynistic myths right from the start.

Solid foundations

Explicit activities around challenging gender stereotypes are a key foundation for heading



"Leaving discussions until secondary school seems to be a vitally missed opportunity"

off misogynistic attitudes in later life. From EYFS, children can explore language, colours and play choices with their supportive adults. Young pupils can see that all activities and opportunities are for everyone, and all are helped to take part. For example, one activity could be planning an imaginary birthday party – what colour balloons should we get? What kind of card can we design? Which toy might they like as a birthday gift? What matters here is the imaginary birthday child as an individual, their likes and dislikes – not necessarily assumptions around what a boy or girl might like. EYFS is also a great time to

start engaging with parents on a range of topics and to build trusting relationships.

As children move through to KS1, conversations can start to become more focused on the language of gender stereotypes. It is important that children have the opportunity to learn about a variety of ways to be human. For example, are men in caring roles as accessible to children as women explorers and pioneers? This might mean when you are teaching a topic on Antarctica, you are sure to include examples of female explorers and adventurers. Discussions can be framed around what kind of qualities you need to be a great explorer rather than assumptions that strength and courage are limited to men alone. Similarly,

when studying Florence Nightingale or

Mary Seacole, it is a great opportunity to explore men in caring roles, too. Perhaps a male nurse can come and visit the class to discuss the care and empathy he needs to do his job.

Take it seriously

In KS2, further nuance and explicit teaching can be introduced. The media can be interrogated for 'fake news' as a way to teach the harmful effects of stereotyping. Adults can also take a non-negotiable approach for opportunistic teachable moments, just as they would for homophobic and racist incidents. Other activities can be linked to mental health and wellbeing, the role of online influencers, and navigating healthy relationships. One idea could be for pupils to team up to plan, storyboard, film and edit their own social media shorts, with messaging focused on inclusion, positivity and challenging gender stereotypes and sexism.

Primary schools are in a unique position to challenge harmful stereotypes through everyday teaching, inclusive values, and a whole-school approach.

By addressing these issues from the start, we give children the tools to build a more respectful and equal society. **TP**

5 WAYS TO KICK MISOGYNY OUT

1 Take a holistic approach.

Look at the whole curriculum.

Important discussions can happen in PSHE, but also across a range of learning. Opportunities to model, teach and discuss empathy, kindness and respecting others will be unplanned as well as planned.

2 Link up learning.

Connect conversations on misogyny to racism, homophobia and other prejudices. Look at imbalances of power and privilege to frame conversations and help children to understand the harmful effects.

3 Use books.

There are so many fantastic texts that show a range of ways of being a human, from great picturebooks to thought-provoking chapter books, such as:

- *Jabari Jumps* by Gaia Cornwall
- *Look Up!* by Nathan Bryon
- *We're Going to Find the Monster!* by Malorie Blackman
- *A Dress with Pockets* by Lilly Murray
- *Tough Guys (Have Feelings Too)* by Keith Negley

4 Teach, model and practise critical thinking.

This could be through oracy, philosophy sessions, or engaging with media sources. Empower children to question what they see and how they might interact with information that could be untrue.

5 Value your values.

Connect learning on misogyny, sexism and gender stereotypes to values as a way to share with the whole school community what they look like in practice.



Kirsty Ruthven is a primary school teacher, PhD researcher, and service manager at The Children's Society.

tinyurl.com/tp-BGS

boyhoodinitiative.org

How can I HELP?

When bullying crops up, it can be a time-consuming and difficult situation, but following some simple steps can help curb the stress, says **Alan Shields**

I clearly remember, as a young headteacher, two girls (about 10 years old) who would frequently pitch up to my office after lunch break. The scene would always play out in a similar way: the girls would tell me about the problems that occurred over break time, the things that had been said, the games that people had been left out of and the inappropriate language that had been used. I would listen carefully, show empathy and ask questions when I needed to clarify points. Then, just as I was about to settle upon a plan of action, the girls would announce “but don’t worry Mr Shields,

Prevention is better than cure

Like with many things, it is important that we focus our efforts on prevention. I would suggest that there should be three areas of focus here. First, is there a robust programme in place to teach children about equality, fairness and mutual respect? This should include a range of issues including race, religion, gender identity, disability, neurodivergence, etc. The UN Convention on the Rights of a Child (UNCRC) may provide a helpful framework for this. If children do not have a good understanding of

Such resources can help to equip children and young people with the knowledge, skills and strategies to deal with bullying should it become an issue for them. The development of peer anti-bullying champions or mentors may be an approach worth considering, too. Any such initiative will, of course, require careful training and support. In the current climate, it is essential that any anti-bullying approach has a strong focus on potential online issues.

Third, it can be really helpful to look at the contextualised aspect of any previous bullying incidents. Are there particular times of day when bullying is more likely to occur? Are certain locations acting as ‘hot spots’ for bullying? Are some groups of children more

vulnerable than others? It may be possible to take action in response to this contextual information. For example, is it possible to re-deploy some staffing to the ‘hot spot’ area? Can some type of diversionary activity or club be put on to mitigate the risk at particular times of the day or for particular groups?

When the worst does happen

All these actions should help to minimise the possibility that bullying will occur... but they can’t eliminate it, unfortunately.

What do you do if a child, or

“If children don’t have a good understanding of equality, there’ll be fertile soil in which bullying can take root”

we are all friends now” and would skip out of my room, hand-in-hand. Despite the frustration at losing half an hour I would never get back – and could have used more productively – the relief I felt at not having to unpick a complicated bullying situation far outweighed it.

Whether as a class teacher or a senior leader, having to deal with bullying can be both time-consuming and challenging. So, how do we deal with such incidents if they occur and, perhaps more importantly, how can we reduce the likelihood of them happening in the first place?

equality, fairness and mutual respect then there will be fertile soil in which bullying can take root.

Second, children need help to understand what bullying is and, importantly, what it isn’t. They need help to understand what bullying looks, and feels like, and what they should do if they feel it is happening to them. There are lots of high quality, and often free, resources available to help with this. A great starting point is the Anti-Bullying Alliance or the Respect Me organisation in Scotland (find links in the panel).



parent, approaches you to raise a bullying concern? I would suggest that the fact they have come to you is a good sign; they've had the confidence to reach out, and they almost certainly believe that you can, and will, resolve the situation.

The most important first step is always to listen carefully. It is essential that, as well as capturing all relevant information, you ensure that pupils feel heard. The priority should be allowing the affected child to speak freely, so it's important to ask questions to clarify points. Your next steps will

very much depend on what answers you get.

Every school will, or certainly should, have their own processes for recording bullying incidents, or allegations. Such processes, including whom to notify in your school, should be followed carefully. If the disclosure has come directly from a child, then one of the next steps will be to let their parents know. Sometimes there can be a concern on the part of the child or their parent that if the alleged bullies are approached it will only make matters worse. In my experience, this is

rarely the case. Nevertheless, I always try and work on the principle of 'informed consent'. In other words, laying out the different potential courses of action, the likelihood of a successful outcome, and any other likely 'consequences', so there can be an informed discussion about the best way forward. Generally, the focus should be on restorative approaches and education rather than punishment.

Follow-up is key

In order to ensure the best possible outcomes for all

KEY INFO

 1.54 million children aged 10–15 in England (approx.

34.9 per cent) experienced in-person bullying in the past year (via *Office for National Statistics*).

 847,000 children (approx. 19.1 per cent) aged 10–15 experienced online bullying.

 Cyberbullying is on the rise, especially among 11-year-old girls, with 30 per cent reporting being bullied online (via *University of Kent HBSC Study*).

Useful resources

- anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk
- respectme.org.uk

parties, it's crucial to follow up on any bullying incident or allegation. Some check-ins a week, and then a month, after the original concern can help to confirm that there has not been any reoccurrence. Check-ins with parents or carers can also help to reassure them that you have not forgotten about the issue and that it is still on your radar.

As teachers, bullying, and allegations of bullying, can be one of the most challenging issues we deal with. If you ensure that the curricular building blocks are in place, take time to listen, focus on potential solutions, record carefully and follow-up diligently, it is possible to secure positive outcomes for all concerned. **TP**



Alan Shields
is a local authority inclusion officer and former

primary head with almost 30 years' experience in the state and independent sectors.

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Isn't it AMAZING?

The loss of wonder in learning isn't just affecting enjoyment, but attainment, too. However, a change in outlook could bring it all back, says **Kenny Primrose**

There is a romantic ideal of education that I would like to keep alive: images of schools where young people encounter ideas, wrestle with meaning, and feel a sense of genuine wonder at what they are discovering. Increasingly though, this ideal feels naive and misplaced in an educational culture that is continually being optimised for efficiency and measurability.

Of course, measuring is incredibly useful; we need to know how literate and numerate students are. But as metrics have become

the currency of accountability in PISA scores, Ofsted inspections, league tables, and endless internal data dashboards, something subtler gets lost. Evidence becomes a proxy for trust. Teachers are treated as technicians, and schools are managed into mechanistic production lines.

And perhaps that's the danger. When measurement becomes the driving principle of education, the immeasurable aspects of learning begin to wither. What cannot be counted begins not to count.

Quality or quantity?

This narrowing of an educational vision shapes and distorts the attention of both pupils and teachers. The psychiatrist and philosopher Iain McGilchrist has argued that the kind of attention we pay to the world shapes what we see. In *The Master and His Emissary*, he describes how our two brain hemispheres offer profoundly different modes of attending. The left hemisphere fixes on detail, seeks control, and treats what it perceives as material to be used. The right

hemisphere, by contrast, holds things in context. It sees relationships, ambiguity, and implicit meaning.

McGilchrist argues that the left hemisphere mode of attention has come to govern and dominate society. It is manifest everywhere, and education has not been spared from this grasp for control. What is valued is what can be manipulated, counted, or displayed on a spreadsheet. The result is an education that may have become more efficient, but not necessarily wise.

When schools operate purely in instrumental terms, we train students to 'see every tree as potential wood' as philosopher Hannah Arendt put it. In doing so, the ability to see and value what cannot be weighed and quantified is lost.

"What cannot be counted begins not to count"



What about wonder?

We have come to value what the left hemisphere values: that which can be instrumentalised and controlled. This has entailed an approach to learning which is increasingly prescriptive and formulaic, and as such, aspects of learning that don't lend themselves to quantification are overlooked. Among these, a sense of wonder in young people is one of the saddest casualties.

The psychologist Dacher Keltner has done considerable research on the emotion of awe, finding it to be a human universal with a distinct set of benefits for individuals and groups (tinyurl.com/tp-DKawe). According to Keltner, 'Awe is the feeling of

being in the presence of something vast that transcends your understanding of the world.' He has found that when we experience awe, there are a host of benefits to the body. There is a reduction in activity in the brain's default mode network (leading to a decrease in self-focus), and an attendant increase in pro-social behavior. There is an increase in connectivity between brain regions, and a sense of curiosity and perceptual openness. The heart rate slows, and time seems to dilate, absorbing the awe-struck person in the moment.

Research tells us that there are eight universal triggers for awe: moral beauty, collective effervescence, nature, music, visual design, spirituality and religion, life and death, and epiphany. Clearly there will be some cultural specificity in how these look, but they exist universally as triggers.

The point...

If an instrumental mindset towards teaching narrows and hardens our vision, awe is what widens and softens it again. Awe is what happens when we encounter something that resists our control; when we stand before an idea, a landscape, or a person and feel both smaller and more alive. In education, awe reminds us that learning isn't just about acquiring knowledge but about being changed by it. It's the moment a student realises that Shakespeare understood something about grief they'd never been able to name, or that a mathematical pattern mirrors something profound about the structure of the universe. Awe restores a sense of proportion, reminding us that the point of learning is not just mastery, but participation in something larger than ourselves.

Teachers can't manufacture awe, but we can create the conditions in which it becomes more likely. That might mean slowing down, giving pupils time to dwell with a question rather than racing to an answer. It might mean focusing on wonder rather than outcomes; asking *what does this reveal?* Instead of *what do they need to know for the test?* It might mean bringing the world into the classroom in all its richness; music, poetry, silence, stories, experiments, and helping children attend to what's in front of them with patience and curiosity. Awe flourishes when teachers model it themselves; when they speak with genuine enthusiasm, or admit that something still puzzles them.

We can't readily measure the impact of awe on our classrooms, but it is one of the most profound and formative gifts of education. Teaching only loses its vitality and wonder when it fails to create space for it. **TP**

AWE-INSPIRING ACTIVITIES



Begin topics with a 'big wonder' moment. One way of doing this is by zooming in and out. Take, for example, the intricacy of an oak leaf. Zoom in and focus on its incredible fractal patterns, then think about the fact that a tree produces 250,000 of these leaves a day. Zoom out again and think of forests containing countless wonders like this.



Reveal the hidden in the ordinary, showing students the unseen complexity of everyday things, especially in nature. Beauty is an awe trigger; bring it into your lessons.



Storytelling adds emotional depth, connecting children to human experiences of discovery, creativity, and resilience across time and disciplines. Why not tie in a related fictional story, or engaging non-fiction book on the topic of your discussion?



Use moments of silence and reflection to allow pupils to internalise their sense of wonder. This can be done through journaling, sketching, or quiet thought after a powerful idea or discussion.



Kenny Primrose is an education consultant and writer, with over 15 years' experience in teaching and leadership. He is also host of The Examined Life podcast.

kennethprimrose.co.uk
 examined-life.com

5 REASONS TO TRY... MELVA

Develop pupils' emotional literacy, resilience, and confidence with this whole-school programme

1 A WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH TO WELLBEING

MELVA brings wellbeing into everyday school life, using the character Melva Mapletree to help pupils build emotional literacy, resilience and self-management. "It's brilliant to have a shared language for feelings across all year groups," says one teacher. Designed for all pupils, not just those struggling, MELVA fosters a preventative culture. A MELVA license, worth £1000 per year to a school, is currently free for a limited time.

2 ENGAGING STORIES THAT OPEN UP CONVERSATIONS

Through storytelling, animation, games and an illustrated novel, MELVA can explore anxiety, grief, friendships and peer pressure. Humorous, lovable characters, give children a safe space to reflect and discuss feelings. "The children really engage and open up in ways you don't always see," reports a Key Stage 2 teacher.

MELVA is a creative way to embed PSHE in a fun and engaging way.

3 GROWING WITH PUPILS

MELVA evolves with pupils from Key Stage 1 to Year 6. Younger children focus on emotional literacy, while older pupils explore self-image, transitions, worries and grief. Consistent use builds



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familiarity and a shared vocabulary. "We can see real improvements in confidence and how children handle tricky emotions," says a Year 5 teacher. Year-on-year engagement fosters

30 SECOND BRIEFING

MELVA is a whole-school wellbeing programme using storytelling, games and digital resources to help primary pupils develop emotional literacy, resilience, self-management and confidence while supporting teachers to deliver PSHE effectively.

empathy and problem-solving and brings wellbeing into everyday learning, equipping children with skills they can carry throughout life.

4 SUPPORTING TEACHERS AND CURRICULUM LINKS

MELVA supports staff as well as pupils. The curriculum-linked activities help deliver PSHE by meeting wellbeing learning objectives. Based on frameworks including the NHS 5 Steps to Wellbeing, lessons are structured yet flexible, supporting literacy, oracy, resilience, empathy and teamwork. Drama-based activities develop children's focus, self-awareness and confidence, so teachers can embed wellbeing with minimal prep.

5 EVIDENCE-LED, CREATIVE AND PRACTICAL

Co-created with teachers, mental health professionals, parents and children, MELVA embeds wellbeing consistently across the curriculum. The portal tracks progress with pupils showing strong improvements in understanding mental health topics and in practical self-management techniques. "It's amazing to see children applying what they've learned to real-life situations," says a Year 6 teacher.

KEY POINTS

CREATIVE APPROACH TO WELLBEING EDUCATION

Teachers choose from our episodic film, games, book and animated series, to tailor lessons to meet wellbeing outcomes confidently.

ADAPTABLE LESSON PLANS AND RESOURCES

Each lesson plan with resources can be adapted to a range of settings, including assemblies, intervention groups and weekly PSHE classes.

TEACHER TOOLKIT AND CPD

Annual CPD sessions digitally and in person to support all teaching staff to deliver wellbeing outcomes while keeping well themselves.

AWARD-WINNING PROGRAMME

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How to make PROCUREMENT work for you

Procurement is not the most exciting part of school leadership, but right now it is one of the most important. With primary budgets under increasing strain, every purchase carries weight. Leaders are expected to meet legal requirements, secure the best value and free up staff time, all while managing complex contracts that can be far bigger than they first appear. For many primary schools this can feel daunting,

especially when only a few people in the building are responsible for navigating the rules.

For many schools, having trust-wide support can make the process feel more manageable. At Bradford Diocesan Academies Trust (BDAT), the ability to buy at scale, centralise workload and bring schools into shared decision making has improved value for money and strengthened compliance.

Those benefits are significant, but they are not automatic. They've come from learning what works, putting clear processes in place and planning ahead.

Start with clarity

Effective procurement starts with understanding the value of what is being bought and how that determines the next steps. Some primary schools underestimate the value of a contract. A service that looks like £25,000 a year becomes a £125,000 procurement once it runs across a five-year contract, and it is the total value that ultimately matters, not the annual figure.

Therefore, a clear scheme of delegation prevents mistakes. Schools should know which approvals are needed at different thresholds, which routes are required and when a tender or framework becomes necessary. Once the total value of a contract reaches around £75,000, a formal tender with competitive bids is usually required. Higher values, or procurements

involving several schools, often move onto a framework, where pre-approved suppliers meet legal and compliance standards. This helps schools avoid running a full tender from scratch and reduces risk. Understanding these differences helps leaders choose the right route early.

When and how to use frameworks

The Procurement Act 2023, which came into force this year, prompted many schools to revisit their processes. The change that matters most in practice is the move towards identifying the most advantageous tender rather than simply the cheapest. That shift encourages schools to consider quality as well as price, and is something that we, as a trust,

have long worked on the basis of. Frameworks remain a valuable tool. They provide compliant, pre-checked suppliers and reduce the administrative burden on schools. Crown Commercial Service and Department for Education recommended frameworks feature heavily in BDAT's major procurements. However, the trust avoids single supplier frameworks where possible as they make it harder to demonstrate value. Competition is still essential, even within a framework.

A recent trust-wide IT procurement reflects this. By using a recommended framework, setting a detailed scope and shortlisting carefully, BDAT secured a managed service that has delivered savings of around £250,000 for our primary schools over the life of the contract. Those savings can be

redirected into teaching, support and resources that directly benefit pupils and staff, and the process remained transparent with schools having a strong say in what the final service needed to deliver.

Bring schools into the process

We have seen that procurement works best when it is collaborative. Schools know their communities, and should not feel that decisions are imposed on them. For that reason, we ensure headteachers and school business managers sit on tender panels, with trustees involved for transparency and oversight.

This approach has helped us make better decisions for our primaries and has strengthened buy-in. Staff also learn the process through being involved. The same approach supported a major centralisation project last year that brought together all statutory maintenance contracts across our 21 schools. Fourteen mandatory checks per school once meant 21 different sets of suppliers and deadlines. Centralising this has delivered significant savings, reduced duplication and released staff

What is the Public Procurement Act, and what does it mean for primary schools?

Nearly three quarters (70.6 per cent) of school procurement leaders said there are gaps in the training and resources needed to support implementation of the new Public Procurement Act 2023, which came into force this year.

A new survey of over 500 senior executives and procurement leaders, commissioned by Commercial Services Group, a provider of public sector procurement and education services, reveals a mix of cautious optimism and concern. More than one in 10 (12.4 per cent) of school procurement leaders believe the Act will fail to strengthen workforce capacity or capability, despite this being a central objective of the reforms. Nearly a third (27.9 per cent) also reveal that they do not believe that the ambitions of the National Procurement Policy Statement (NPPS) are a priority at board or senior leadership level, with 25.8 per cent viewing the Act primarily as a compliance exercise.

While education respondents broadly welcome the Act, with nearly half (49.3 per cent) believing it will deliver social and economic value to local communities, more than two in five (42.2 per cent) working in schools are unfamiliar with how it will help achieve the objectives of the NPPS, which will impact new contracts.



The education sector faces increasingly squeezed budgets and limited resources. Although the new Procurement Act represents an opportunity to unlock improved resource capacity and efficiencies, support is clearly needed to harness these for the benefit of the next generation.

Organisations need practical tools like easy-to-use frameworks, such as those provided by procurement services, that enable compliant procurement and unlock the full benefits the Act has been introduced to deliver. This will be key to ensure meaningful change across the sector, rather than engaging with it purely as a compliance exercise.

More broadly across the public sector, confidence in the direction of the new Act remains high. Although the education

sector is more sceptical, 84 per cent of total survey respondents stated they are confident in their ability to deliver on the NPPS priorities, and over three-quarters (76 per cent) view the Act as a genuine opportunity for change.

For primary schools to fully harness the benefits of the Procurement Act, leaders must act swiftly. Research shows that school staff continue to feel unprepared and unfamiliar with its requirements, underscoring the need for change. Prioritising the ambitions of the NPPS at a senior leadership level is key to driving progress. Tailored training sessions as well as thorough audits of existing processes can empower teams with the confidence to capitalise on the Act's strategic opportunities. By adopting clear frameworks, such as those offered by Procurement Services, schools can ensure compliance while enhancing resource efficiency and positioning themselves for long-term success.



Matt Selwyn-Smith is managing director at The Education People.



“When done well, procurement is one of the most powerful tools leaders have to protect quality of education”

capacity, with smaller primaries seeing the greatest benefit.

Plan ahead

Procurement mistakes often stem from pressure rather than poor judgement. Tight budgets can push leaders to focus on immediate cost. Limited time encourages reliance on familiar suppliers or automatic contract rollovers.

Subsequently, forward planning offers better protection. Knowing when contracts end, reviewing whether they still meet the school's needs in good time and checking whether the multi-year value triggers a different procurement route all help schools stay ahead of the process rather than react to it.

One key piece of advice is to know your thresholds and ask for guidance early. If there is any uncertainty, it is better to seek advice before starting the process than to discover too late that a limit has been exceeded or a step missed.

Build confidence

Procurement can feel like a specialist field, especially for leaders whose expertise lies in teaching or pastoral care. We have therefore found that investing in communication and shared practice can upskill and support our headteachers. Our school business managers also meet regularly through professional learning communities,

and headteachers and local governing boards are kept updated as policies evolve. The trust also directs schools to government training where relevant to best support colleagues.

This emphasis on support helps schools feel less isolated and more confident in their role within the overall process.

The full picture

While the financial picture is central to procurement, for us, value is not only about savings. Procurement affects workload, school culture, consistency and the quality of services children receive. Good procurement delivers reliability and long-term benefits, making life easier for staff. It strengthens compliance and helps scarce resources stretch further without compromising standards.

For primary schools facing intense financial pressures, that wider definition of value is more important now than ever. Procurement may not be glamorous, but when done well, it becomes one of the most powerful tools leaders have to protect the quality of education they offer.



Mark Dowson is head of corporate projects at Bradford Diocesan Academies Trust.

 bdat-academies.org



Max value

In December 2025, the DfE announced their 'Maximising Value for Pupils' (MVP) programme, which aims to 'maximise value from the investment in the school system, so every pound delivers for children'.

Below is a summary of the key points from the four pillars of the programme; commercial, assets, workforce, and developing capability (including digital and technology).

1 COMMERCIAL We are harnessing the collective buying power of around 22,000 state-funded schools, taking on key areas of spending and helping secure better deals and maximise value from budgets. Schools and trusts, on average, spend 20 per cent of their budgets on non-staff costs. We believe more can be done to help schools and trusts achieve better value in this area. This means schools and trusts can invest more in frontline provision that makes the greatest difference for children.

2 ASSETS Investing in new technology, for example, can help tackle staff workload and increase productivity. Where it is legitimate for schools and trusts to hold cash to manage financial risks, these funds should be invested in accounts that offer a strong return on investment – and our new banking tool can help to do this.

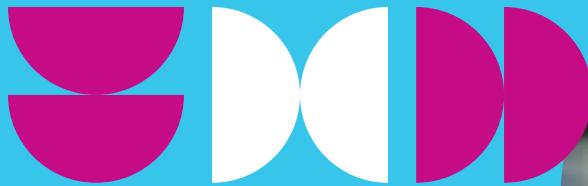
3 WORKFORCE We know schools and trusts undertake spending in some costly areas that are not optimal for pupils' outcomes – for example, national expenditure on agency supply teachers reached £1.4bn in 2023/24. We will crack down on unacceptable practices and excessive supplier margins within the teacher supply market, to help reduce school spend on agency supply teachers.

4 DEVELOPING CAPABILITY We are committed to building capability by, for example, supporting schools and trusts to improve their commercial expertise, meet digital standards and share what works across the sector. We encourage schools and trusts to make use of the opportunities available, including:

- virtual and in-person training
- qualification bursaries
- mentoring
- advisers who can provide peer-to-peer advice on using revenue and capital resources effectively

Find more information at
tinyurl.com/tp-MVP25

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STEM SPECIAL

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How not to use AI

We all feel the draw of a Friday afternoon timesaver, but tech-assisted planning is only as good as the info you feed it...



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Using both digital and analogue games in maths can help solidify concepts and expand understanding in theory and practice

HOW NOT *to use AI*

We all feel the draw of a Friday afternoon timesaver, but tech-assisted planning is only as good as the info you feed it...

ANNA FANNON

It's Friday, and you're exhausted. Year 6 are trudging through the final hour like extras from *The Walking Dead*. Year 3 are buzzing from free time; one child is crying over lost gloves, and you're in dire need of something engaging, purposeful, and deliverable before the final 40 minutes of the teaching day.

"I know!" you think. "ChatGPT! It'll provide the plan I need, complete with a quiz and an exit ticket."

And it will. *Sort of*. But often, what you receive is a lesson lacking soul – generic, unrealistic, and not tailored to the unique individuals you know so well. Whether it's the wide-eyed Year 1 students who need a story hook, or a Year 5 class with varied temperaments, AI can't perceive these nuances. Children have quirks, humour, needs, moods, and a dozen different reactions to the same instruction. A polished AI lesson may look impressive, but it's empty. Relying on it blindly is counterproductive, contradicting the very reason you reached for the tool initially.

Because AI is a tool – a powerful one, but still just a tool. A hammer can drive a nail, but it can't build a door. AI can support planning, but it can't replicate your understanding of classroom dynamics, SEN considerations, pastoral issues, department priorities, school culture, or the emotional upheaval of "something happened at lunchtime".

The copy and paste curriculum

Requesting 'a KS1 sequence on adjectives' from AI and pasting it directly into your planner results in a neat yet bland plan, disconnected from your learners. AI doesn't know about your 30-minute window before assembly or the mysteriously vanished glue sticks. Combining several AI plans often results in a chaotic patchwork of tasks that lack flow.

soothe an EYFS meltdown or de-escalate a Year 4 argument. Teaching is as emotional as it is cognitive.

The best approach to using AI is simple: think first, then use the tool to refine, extend, adapt, or sense-check. When used effectively, AI can reduce admin, spark creativity, and provide something invaluable in education: time. With practice, you'll learn which prompts yield the best results.

The good, the bad, and the useful

A lot of the magic of AI lies in the prompts you give it. To ensure you stand the best chance of getting something useful out of your request, a detailed and clear brief is essential. For example:

"Teaching thrives in unpredictable moments, spontaneous discussions, laughter, connections, and sparks of curiosity."

Similarly, inputting a pupil's answer into AI for feedback yields responses that sound correct but miss empathy, nuance, and progress recognition. AI won't notice when a Year 2 child finally uses full stops, or when a Year 6 student's structure improves dramatically.

Your assistant

The issue isn't AI itself, of course. The problem arises when teachers hand over their thinking, instead of using it to enhance their ideas. AI can write text, generate ideas, create images, simplify explanations, and tidy up content, but it can't



Bad prompt: “Plan a fun Year 5 lesson on fractions.” This is too vague; there’s no context.

Better prompt: “Create a 45-minute Year 5 maths lesson introducing unit fractions. Include a practical starter, clear modelling, one scaffolded task, one stretch task, and language suitable for mixed-ability learners. Do not include tasks requiring cutting or gluing.”

Excellent prompt: “Here is my draft lesson outline for a mixed-ability Year 5 class. Context: Three pupils with SEND working at Year 3 level. One EAL learner new to English with basic sentence comprehension. Twenty-eight

pupils total. Lesson is 45 minutes before lunch. They respond well to visuals and worked examples. My draft: [paste your skeleton] Improve this by adding modelling questions, refining examples, checking misconceptions, and providing three ways to differentiate without additional worksheets.”

Bad prompt: “Make this worksheet easier.”

Good prompt: “Simplify this worksheet for a Year 6 student with working memory difficulties. Keep the objective the same but reduce cognitive load by shortening sentences, increasing white space, using visuals, reducing

steps, and providing a model answer for the first question.”

Bad prompt: “Write feedback for this.”

Good prompt: “Write formative feedback for this Year 4 writing piece. Focus on sentence structure, punctuation, and development of ideas. Use warm, encouraging language and give one target and one next step.”

The human touch

AI is brilliant when used wisely. It can tidy, draft, clarify, summarise, or polish. It might even save your sanity during a busy week. But only you know when a Year 1 has reached their emotional limit, when a Year 3 is just warming up, or when the class needs humour, visuals, scaffolding, or calm.

Teaching thrives in unpredictable moments, spontaneous discussions, laughter, connections, and sparks of curiosity. No prompt can replicate those. Every great lesson is a blend of structure and instinct, and that balance will always be down to you. **TP**



EXTRA TOOLS

For a little more support when using AI and creating resources, try out these ideas:



Canva Design School: this is a brilliant resource within Canva that guides building engaging educational designs and visual learning materials. It helps teachers create accessible, attractive resources without hours of reinvention.



CPD: AI-focused courses can significantly enhance your ability to integrate technology effectively. They help you understand the tool beyond a quick prompt, ensuring purposeful, ethical, and confident usage. Check with your SLT or search online for available courses.



Collaboration with colleagues: often, a human resource is the best option. Sharing prompts, ideas, pitfalls, and successful strategies with peers reduces trial and error, and increases confidence. You might even find that another teacher has already found the shortcut you've been searching for.



Anna Fannon is an experienced PE teacher and head of year, now focused on championing staff wellbeing and smarter workload solutions.

Collins

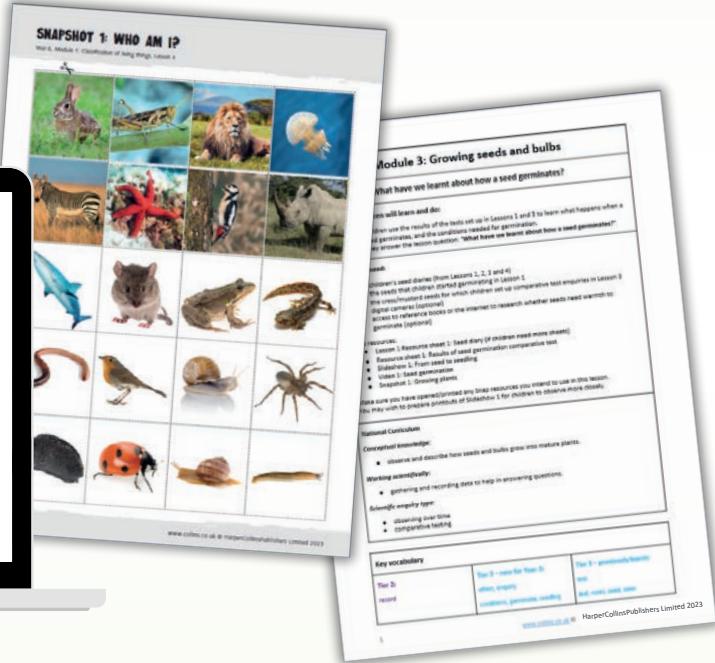


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Coding for UNDERSTANDING

Designing tasks that build computational thinkers will support your curriculum far beyond computing, says **Karl McGrath**

Computing gives children powerful ways to think; after all, it is a subject that teaches them *how to think*. When we teach programming and coding well, we help pupils understand how systems behave, why outcomes happen, and how logical decisions shape a sequence. Coding becomes a form of reasoning rather than a set of digital skills. This viewpoint guides my planning, and I try to design tasks that allow children to grapple with concepts such as decomposition, abstraction, and algorithmic thinking, because these habits mirror the disciplinary reasoning found in maths, science, and computing. If children can think well, they can code well.

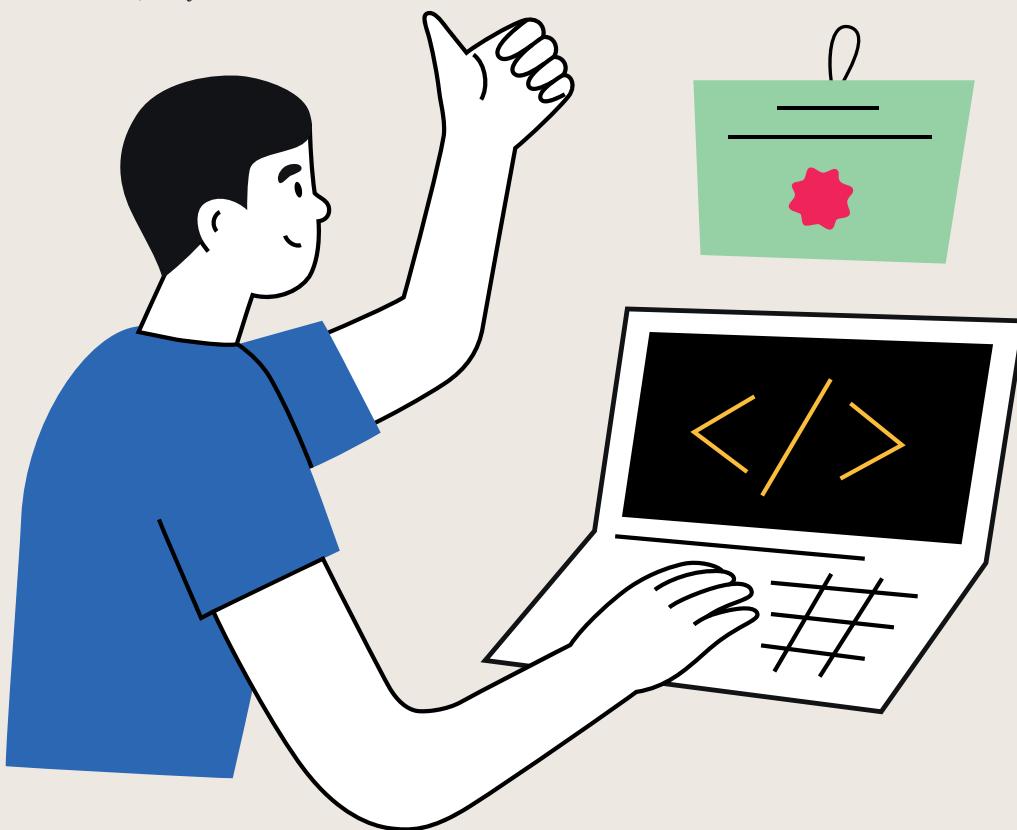
Coding as reasoning

We've all watched children produce something colourful on Scratch or MakeCode and been unsure about what they have actually learned. Busy screens can mask shallow thinking, but good computing lessons take a different route; they start with the concept, not the tool. They offer children well-structured tasks that slow the process down, create space to examine behaviour, and draw attention to what matters in the code.

In my own classroom, I use a combination of paper-based reasoning tasks, prediction prompts, unplugged models, and structured programming episodes. These sit comfortably within the PRIMM approach (Predict, Run, Investigate, Modify, Make). The aim is not to rush children towards an app, a screen, or a finished product. It is to help them articulate what they believe the system is doing, why it behaves the way it does, and how a small change can ripple through a sequence.

This approach was spearheaded by Sue Sentance and is supported by research from Computing At School (CAS) and the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), both of which remind us that problem-solving develops when children explain their thinking and test their ideas through structured practice. Sue's central argument is that code, as children encounter it, is a language with its own rules and syntax, so it needs to be taught in a similar way to reading and writing. We learn by predicting, inferring, and interpreting before we can create or innovate our own work.

“Coding becomes a form of reasoning rather than a set of digital skills”



The scientific method

When we teach coding as reasoning, we lean naturally into the practices that underpin mathematical and scientific enquiry. The scientific method offers a clear structure. It asks children to predict, test, and then evaluate. Coding tasks can mirror this without much additional work or resources.

A good example comes from an unplugged comparison task, in which children examine three pieces of MicroPython code printed inside the outline of a head and decide which is correct. The task is deliberately abstract. It asks children to focus on structure rather than presentation. They look for indentation, consistent conditions, and the correct flow in the loop. The head outlines create a sense of

distance from the full coding environment. This helps children reason logically without being distracted by symbols, colours, or familiar interfaces.

This encourages scientific habits; children are encouraged to predict, test, evaluate, and adjust their explanation, and they are engaged in controlled thinking rather than trial-and-error.

Cross-curricular thinking

When we treat coding as a form of reasoning, children begin to notice patterns that link across the curriculum. They recognise that decomposition in computing mirrors breaking down a multi-step calculation in maths, or isolating variables in a science experiment. They see how abstraction involves focusing on important information and removing unnecessary detail, much like particle models or simplified maps in geography. They begin to appreciate that algorithmic thinking underpins the step-by-step approach they take in practical science or long

division. These parallels make computing feel purposeful rather than isolated.

When children realise that the thinking they develop in computing strengthens their reasoning in other subjects, confidence grows and misconceptions reduce.

Computing unplugged

A strong coding sequence often begins away from the computer. In the same way that multiplication and division provide a strong foundation for long division, unplugged tasks reduce cognitive load and develop a clear conceptual foundation before adding the features of a coding environment. When we combine this with the PRIMM approach, we encourage children to form a complete understanding of the concept before moving on to a device. For example:

Stage 1: paper-based reasoning

Give children three versions of the same code (this could be for any purpose – pick something they've encountered before, such as an if/then sequence).

Then ask them to compare the three versions, identify the correct one, and explain their reasoning. They might work with abstract diagrams such as the hexagon flow representing network systems. They might predict outcomes using a printed program. Each task slows children down and foregrounds the thinking process.

Stage 2: structured prediction tasks

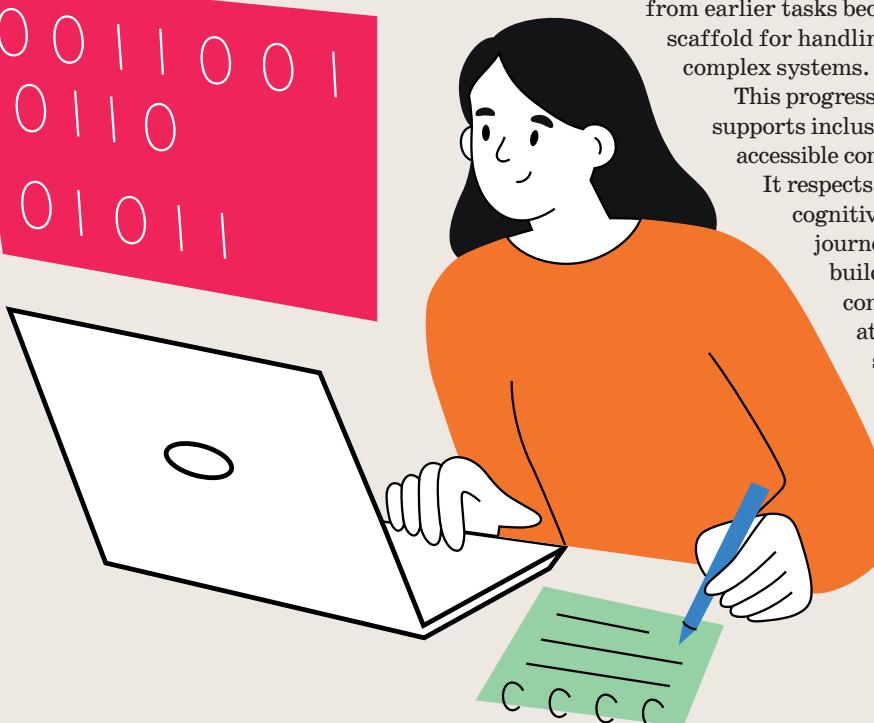
After developing a conceptual model, children move to a controlled on-screen environment. A simple program with a variable or loop (such as Scratch or MakeCode) becomes a vehicle for exploring sequence, selection, and repetition. Prediction questions guide their attention. Reflection questions encourage them to refine their explanation.

Stage 3: transition to physical computing

Once children can explain behaviour in a virtual environment, they move to micro:bit projects such as the stop:bit. This encourages them to think about real-world inputs and outputs. They examine the effect of buttons, sensors, and timing. Their reasoning from earlier tasks becomes a scaffold for handling more complex systems.

This progression supports inclusive and accessible computing. It respects the cognitive journey and builds confidence at each stage. **TP**

0011001
0110
01011



ACTIVITIES FOR PRACTICE



Paper-based debugging

Give children three versions of the same code and ask which one will work. Encourage them to justify their choice and identify errors using precise vocabulary.



Prediction cards

Provide small cards showing short programs. Children predict the output, swap their cards with a partner, and compare their explanations.



Scratch investigation

Use a simple program where one sprite changes a count. Ask children to explain what would happen if a certain block were removed.



Reasoning prompt

Use the question, "Which is correct and how do you know?". Apply it to code, flow diagrams, or unplugged models. This keeps the emphasis on explanation rather than activity.



Research insight

CAS highlights the importance of conceptual understanding for later problem-solving. EEF guidance notes that structured talk and precise vocabulary strengthen reasoning across disciplines. Tasks that build explanation and prediction support both strands of research.



Karl McGrath is a Year 6 teacher, curriculum task design lead, and computing lead with a passion for blending digital tools into learning.



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Now and THEN

Staying safe online requires being on top of new developments in a continually evolving landscape, but we mustn't forget to keep our eyes on the basics, argues **Alex Dave**

Most teachers are already confident with the basics of online safety – spotting phishing emails, using search filters, and teaching pupils how to stay safe online. But the digital landscape is rapidly changing; as artificial intelligence, deepfakes, and new online platforms emerge, so too do new risks.

AI – opportunity vs risk

AI is rapidly becoming a useful part of teachers' digital toolkits, but these new tools also bring new responsibilities.

Before using any AI platform, it's essential to check that it has been approved for use by your school (as per your school's policies and procedures), and that due diligence has been completed to ensure that it complies with the DfE's Product Safety Expectations. Any new tool should have a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) before being approved for use, to help safeguard the whole school community.

Many of the mainstream platforms we use – including things like Google search – now include AI functions, meaning pupils could already be accessing these features.

Similarly, other programmes widely used in classrooms, now include chatbot functions that may go unnoticed, but present significant risks. It's important to review learning resources already in use, identify what GenAI

capabilities are built in, and consider whether additional safeguards are required to protect pupils.

Always confirm with your tech team or designated safeguarding lead if you are unsure. If you are using free-to-access versions of any AI platforms, never enter pupil names, identifying details, or any personal data, as it may be stored or used by the platform. Even with paid-for AI tools, you need to make sure that they are not using the data you enter for training.

It's also important to consider the accuracy and bias of AI-generated materials, so double-check any AI content before sharing it with others. Ask the AI tool for references, and check they are not 'hallucinations'.

In it together

Pupils are increasingly independent online – especially at home – so building their digital skills and competencies across the curriculum helps keep them

safe. Demonstrate how you use safe search engines and explain why filters are in place to protect them. Model safe online behaviours – such as 'thinking aloud' when using devices, asking questions about information sources – 'How can I make sure that's true?' 'Let's find more information to verify this.' 'Is this a safe site – how do I know?'

Researching together can help build and reinforce critical thinking skills, encouraging pupils to question the reliability of sources and to recognise misinformation, including content generated by AI. Useful guiding questions around researching can help scaffold pupils' learning.

Discussing the permanence of our digital footprint helps pupils understand that what they share online can remain online forever. Make sure you remind them to tell you or another trusted adult if they see or read something that makes them uncomfortable.

Refreshing the basics

Even as new technologies develop, the fundamentals of cyber security and safeguarding remain vital – while your school will manage system-level protections, individual vigilance and curiosity makes a big difference. A well-informed teacher is the first line of defence against a potential security incident.

It is usually the simplest actions that cause breaches. Always use strong, unique passwords for each account, and enable multi-factor authentication wherever possible. Be cautious about links or attachments in emails, calendar invites, and online communication tools – especially now that AI is being used to craft highly convincing phishing messages – and ensure that software, apps, and browsers are updated so that the latest security patches are in place.

Technology will continue to evolve at pace, and so will the challenges, but you don't need to be a cyber security or safeguarding expert, just engaged and aware. By keeping up with school guidance, checking the safety of new tools before using them, and teaching pupils to think critically online, you can create safer digital classrooms for everyone. **TP**



Alex Dave is safeguarding lead at **LGfL – The National Grid for Learning**.

4 REASONS TO TRY... A day of discovery at the Science Museum

Ignite curiosity in science and maths with a KS2 visit to the Science Museum in London this year

1 WONDERLAB

Packed with interactive exhibits and immersive experiences, our popular *Wonderlab* gallery fuels imaginations and inspires curious minds. Pupils can get hands-on with over 50 exhibits exploring forces, electricity, light, sound, matter and space. Plus you'll get to watch live experiments at the Chemistry Bar. Best of all, school groups visit for free on weekdays during term time.

2 IT TAKES GUTS

Discover the inner workings of the human digestive system in our squirm-inducing *It Takes Guts* show for KS2. Continue your food-themed visit with our new, free *Future of Food* exhibition, exploring how science is creating more sustainable ways of growing, cooking and eating food.

3 SPACE

Blast off into Space in our new free gallery, where you'll discover iconic spacecraft and out-of-this-world objects that tell extraordinary stories. See the spacesuit worn by Helen Sharman, the first Briton in space, and marvel at a three-billion-year-old piece of the Moon.

4 EASY ONLINE BOOKING

With our online group booking system, you can check availability, plan your itinerary and book the visit in one go. You'll just need the date you're planning to visit, the number of adults and children in your group, their age range and any other specific requirements.



Contact:

Visit: sciemuseum.org.uk/groups/formal-education-groups

Email: Info@ScienceMuseumGroup.ac.uk
Call: 033 0058 0058

Key points

- + Our SEN days allow for schools to enjoy a quieter experience in *Wonderlab*. Learn more on our website.
- + Download our ready-to-go activity sheets and gallery guides in advance. Head to the Learning Resources page under the Group section of our website.

Transforming Science Education: Why Your School Needs PSQM

The Primary Science Quality Mark (PSQM) is transforming the way schools approach science leadership, teaching and learning. More than an accreditation, PSQM is a year-long professional development programme which equips subject leaders with the skills, confidence, and strategies to improve curriculum design, teaching and learning, raising the profile of science and celebrating excellence across the school.

Schools taking part see:

- Empowered leaders who drive whole-school improvement in science.
- Engaged pupils who develop curiosity, enquiry skills, knowledge and science capital.
- Recognised impact that makes a real difference.

Meet Dr Jo Montgomery, an award-winning primary science specialist, teacher, trainer, and PSQM Hub Leader who has been teaching children and supporting teachers for more than 25 years.

PSQM
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“I've seen first-hand how PSQM transforms schools. Teachers grow in confidence, bring science to life, and pupils' enthusiasm is infectious. The development and impact are visible in every classroom. With PSQM, schools don't just teach science—they spark a lifelong passion for it.”

Find out more about PSQM here: <https://www.herts.ac.uk/for-business/skills/psqm>
Find out more about Jo here: <https://drjosciencesolutions.co.uk/>

DON'T FORGET TO CHECK OUT....

STEM CATEGORY WINNERS



WINNER

Wonderlab+

Science Museum Group

Wonderlab+ is a free online learning platform designed to engage children aged 7-11 in fun, hands-on science learning – both in the classroom and at home. Building on the success of the Science Museum's much-loved *Wonderlab* galleries, Wonderlab+ is a digital extension that brings interactive, inspiring content directly to young learners. It's packed with experiments, videos, games, and quizzes that help children explore science using everyday ideas and materials, and new content, created by the Science Museum's digital learning team, in partnership with Explainers, curators and volunteers, is regularly added, so you can come back to it again and again.

“ This resource offers a clear, engaging, and easy-to-navigate website suitable for both home and school use”

Dr Jo Montgomery

HIGHLY COMMENDED



STEM with Mr N

STEM with Mr N

Created by an experienced educator, the STEM With Mr N YouTube channel blends creativity, pedagogy, and practical science in an accessible video format that brings STEM learning to life for children aged 5–11.

“These charming videos offer an approachable entry point into STEM”

CATEGORY FINALISTS

THE DIGITAL ADVENTURES OF AVA AND CHIP: TECH ACTIVITY BOOK
AvaChipBooks

CLICKVIEW PRIMARY
ClickView Ltd

WHITE ROSE SCIENCE
White Rose Education



SuperQuesters Mission: River Crest Rescue

QuestFriendz

A STEM-themed adventure chapter book including specially developed experiments and embedded puzzles, and accompanying teaching resource pack, designed for Years 2-4.

“Written with energy and flair, this is an evocative, fast-paced story that will appeal to a wide range of children”

Play it AGAIN

Using both digital and analogue games in maths can help solidify concepts and expand understanding in theory and practice, says **Dr Alison Borthwick**

Using digital games to support teaching and learning has been a part of classroom pedagogy for many years, and there is a wealth of resources across many subjects. Within maths, many place children in digital versions of real-world scenarios, where they can do a wide range of things including counting, measuring, comparing, or sorting. This helps pupils begin to understand numbers and concepts and to see how maths can, and will, fit into their daily lives outside the classroom in a way that allows for endless practice.

At the same time, there is a long tradition of providing opportunities for young children to engage and experience real-world play scenarios, from shops to kitchens to restaurants. Thinking about how we can combine these seemingly quite different approaches to learning offers interesting opportunities.

Combo approach

Often, the digital game is seen as an add-on resource – something that might be used to reinforce learning at home, as part of continuous provision in early years and as ‘golden time’ type activities in KS1. But digital games can also inspire real-world play scenarios in the classroom. This extends the value and impact of the game, and helps children to explore the concepts through their physical play experiences. For example, you may talk about money in class. This activity could

run alongside the use of coins, offering children the chance to play a digital game, and setting up a shop in school. Collectively, this allows children to apply their learning in a variety of different physical activities with their peers. Giving pupils the chance to focus on each stage of their learning individually – number work, physical handling of coins, and the understanding of how this maths is used – sets up multiple opportunities to consolidate and reinforce learning.

Digital games as a stepping stone, or a follow-on, to real-world activities offer children the chance to play in a non-threatening environment where they often feel less pressure around mistakes they may make within the game play. It can offer a chance to replay the scenarios again and again to build confidence. Strengthening the link between digital games and classroom practice also enables children to model the activity they have interacted with on-screen and to extend it. This borrows thinking from the well-known CPA approach (Concrete, Pictorial and Abstract), with the digital resource providing an excellent visual representation of the real-life challenge.

“Children see themselves as able to contribute; they need to think and therefore develop their personal agency”

Low-stakes learning

Playful learning – whether digital or analogue – is a powerful approach,





especially for young children. While I am sure we would all agree that young children play, this isn't the same as playful learning.

For me, playful learning is almost always goal-orientated, creative and less constrained by rules or perceived expectations than traditional lessons. In a word, it is joyful, and pleasure is taken from the exploration of a context. It can involve risk-taking, determination, increased autonomy and agency because it is all about an individual's engagement with that context. It promotes self-awareness and self-regulation. Children see themselves as able to contribute; they need to think and therefore develop their personal agency. Within digital games, all of this can be present while still making sure the setting feels relaxed, and things don't get too competitive.

Practical strategies

Bringing popular educational digital games 'to life' in the classroom is exciting for children, particularly in KS1. The activity enables pupils to the value in learning in different ways, and may particularly benefit children who are struggling with the conceptual elements of mathematics.

For example, handling money and relating it to written numbers can be tricky for some pupils. Setting up a market stall with real coins is a great way of giving children a chance to handle money, and to explore addition, subtraction and exchange in their role play. The inclusion of price stickers will support relating the coins to their numerical value. The BBC's digital game, Space Shoppers, reinforces these money-handling skills in a digital world (tinyurl.com/tp-SpaceShoppers).

Another option might be to add a post office with weighing scales to help children work with heavier and lighter wrapped 'parcels' that need to be sorted. Children can then try relating these weights to their numerical values. This can be paired with Canine Crew (tinyurl.com/tp-CanineCrew), a digital game that includes tasks to help 'Postie Dog' with sorting and measuring the mass of parcels.

Careful thought is needed to bring digital games into real-life play scenarios. It's worth asking: what is the learning and how can I best facilitate this? Which games will best consolidate learning or allow for experimentation and challenge?

By bringing the structure and excitement of digital games into the physical classroom, through imaginative role play and hands-on activities, teachers can make abstract

VIRTUALLY REAL

The new BBC Bitesize game, The Canine Crew, features a bakery, post office and building site – each offering tasks designed to help Key Stage 1 children practise their measuring skills. You can replicate these digital scenarios in your own classroom in a variety of ways:

 Physical post office role play: set up a classroom corner as a post office. Children can take on roles such as postal workers, customers or delivery staff. This hands-on context allows them to physically handle objects, compare weights and measure sizes, providing tangible experiences of mass and size.

 Sorting and classifying activities: provide a variety of construction objects for children to sort into 'light', 'medium' and 'heavy' baskets, or arrange them from smallest to largest.

 Market stall and shopping list: set up a market stall of items. Give children a recipe from which to make a shopping list. Include items sold in sets, such as eggs, and items sold by weight, such as flour.

mathematical concepts more accessible and meaningful while building confidence and embedding knowledge and skills. Play-based approaches, including playful learning, not only deepen mathematical understanding but also nurture essential skills in communication, collaboration and problem-solving. **TP**



Dr. Alison Borthwick
is a mathematics adviser to BBC Bitesize.

 tinyurl.com/tp-BitesizeMaths

// ILLUSIONS AND SCIENCE



WE LOVE TO LEARN

Unlock your brain's secrets

Engage pupils in interactive exhibits that explore the rich learning opportunities of art, psychology and neuroscience

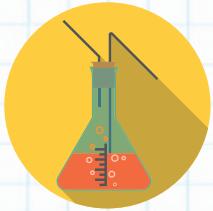
Twist Museum is London's home of illusions – a unique and immersive destination that combines hands-on fun with rich learning opportunities. Developed with experts in art, psychology and neuroscience, and shaped by Professor Fiona Macpherson, its education programme supports national curriculum objectives in science, art, maths and PSHE.

Each school trip includes access to interactive exhibits, cross-curricular

learning and post-visit classroom resources. Twist is accredited by the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom, was a Best Museum Visit finalist at the School Travel Organiser Awards 2025, and has welcomed hundreds of schools with outstanding feedback.

A pre-visit walkthrough is available for teachers, and the museum's dedicated team is available to help with planning, logistics and more. Discounted group rates start from £10 per pupil.

CURRICULUM LINKS



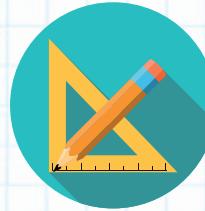
SCIENCE

Discover how the brain interprets the world through hands-on illusions that explore light, perception and the senses, a unique and engaging approach to science and cognitive learning.



ART

Pupils discover how colour, shape and form create visual illusions, deepening their understanding of artistic techniques while sparking creativity and self-expression.



MATHS

Twist's exhibits explore symmetry, pattern, shape and scale, turning abstract concepts into memorable, physical experiences that boost spatial awareness and logical thinking.

LEARNING JOURNEYS

The Twist Challenge

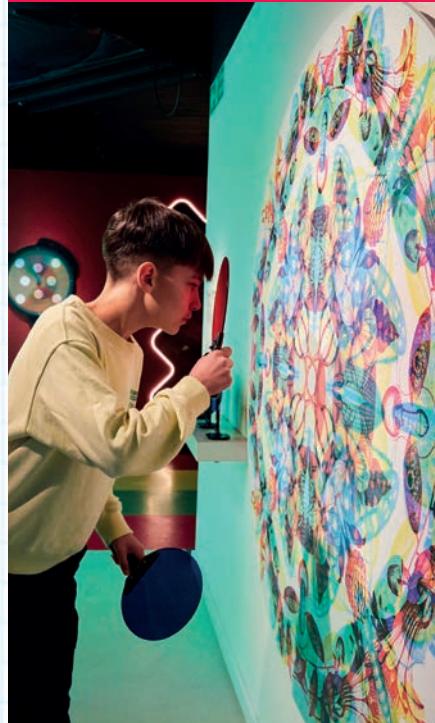
Each school visit includes a curriculum-linked trail that guides pupils through the exhibits with structured, cross-subject questions. The activity sheet encourages observation, reasoning and creative thinking, all while keeping students engaged and exploring independently. Post-visit resources extend learning in the classroom, ensuring educational value continues beyond the day out.

Sensory science in action

Students experience first-hand how sight, sound, temperature and touch can be distorted by context, through interactive illusions grounded in neuroscience. Developed with leading experts, these exhibits help children understand how the brain interprets the world around them, aligning with science and PSHE frameworks.

Teacher support and accessibility

Twist offers free pre-visits for teachers to get all important questions answered, to carry out risk assessments and to experience a guided tour from a duty manager. The school team will assist with bookings and planning. The museum is completely wheelchair accessible, apart from two exhibits.



Leading English



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5 REASONS TO TRY...

Leading English

Adam Lowing explains how Leading English combines in-school support with over 200 medium-term units to transform your English provision....

1 GETTING STARTED

The process begins with a short video call with your dedicated school improvement partner. Together, you will: walk through the implementation project; explore how to access and use the teaching materials; share key documentation (e.g. SEF/SDP); set visit dates and prepare for launch.

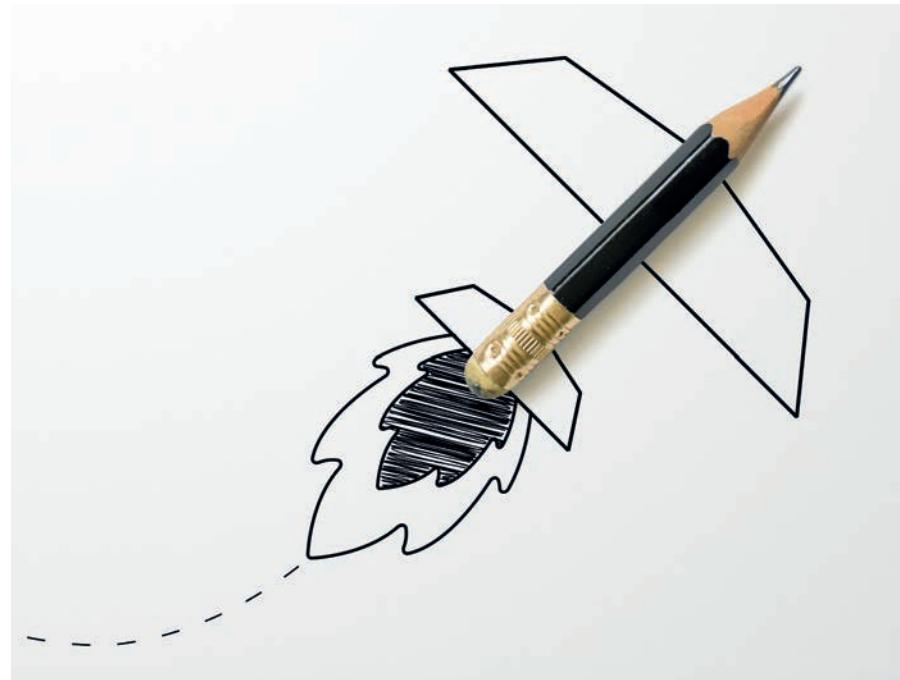
2 VISION AND PLANNING

Next comes the first of three in-school consultancy days. It's held anywhere between one and three months ahead of the project launch and focuses on vision and planning. The visit will include: a strategy session with the headteacher; planning and co-design with the subject lead; pupil voice sessions; CPD for the implementation team (slides provided).

The Leading English team help leaders to foster genuine alignment between what's written and what's taught – research shows this is critical to pupil outcomes. We advocate for curriculum-embedded assessment that helps teachers adapt in real time, and support schools in embedding spoken language across the curriculum. Our units ensure oracy is part of English, not an optional extra.

3 IMPLEMENTATION

The second consultancy visit takes place one to two months after the project launches, and centres on implementation. Here we will: hold a review session with the subject leader; operate co-planning, team teaching and drop-ins; organise pupil voice sessions and feedback; lead a CPD session (INSET or after school). Implementation is not intended to result in perfection overnight. At Leading English, we encourage iterative improvement: small tweaks, informed by staff voice, lesson observation and reflection. We believe in the



Leading English

Contact:

Book a free 30-minute strategy call at leadingenglish.co.uk or email adam.lowing@leadingenglish.co.uk

importance of manageable, meaningful practice including modelling and more sentence-level control. We help you to bring this thinking into the classroom through practical strategies and supportive coaching.

4 REVIEW AND EVALUATION

The final visit in the first year takes place three to six months post-launch and supports sustainability. It includes: a final review of the implementation plan; pupil voice and classroom observation; strategic CPD and leadership guidance; evaluation of impact; formulation of next steps.

5 ONGOING SUPPORT

Ahead of each project day, you'll receive a 30-minute planning call. CPD slides and visit notes are provided. Schools are encouraged to form an implementation team to embed change and trial approaches – we're here for the journey. From regular planning calls to email support, we act as thought partners to help refine your strategy, troubleshoot challenges and celebrate success. We want to help you achieve real impact – not through shortcuts, but through structure, support and care.

KEY POINTS

Clarity and coherence: 200+ units structured to develop vocabulary, grammar and composition in small, purposeful steps. Save time on planning lessons.

Inspiring model texts written by professional children's authors such as Joshua Seigal. These are annotated to support confident, high-impact modelling.

Pedagogy: Through coaching, CPD and co-planning, we help you build pedagogical approaches that lift quality, reduce workload and improve consistency.

"Today's experience helped me develop my leadership skills and increased my confidence in leading a whole-school project."
A Carter, Primary English lead

30 SECOND BRIEFING

With expert support, high-quality resources and a focus on sustainable change, Leading English helps schools raise standards in writing and reduce workload – all through a trusted, collegiate partnership.

FOLLOWING *the reader*

Writing for meaning and purpose requires more than syntactical and grammatical accuracy; pupils must be aware of their audience, argue

Penny Slater and Ellen Counter

There is much to celebrate in the Department for Education's new Writing Framework. It's thoughtful, well-researched, and clearly the product of passionate educators committed to improving outcomes for children. As someone who has spent years working alongside schools to develop effective literacy practice, I find myself mostly in favour of its recommendations. However, as with any national guidance, we must tread carefully to avoid the unintended consequences that can arise from overly rigid interpretations.

We've seen this before. The sector is still feeling the effects of past frameworks that, while well-intentioned, were implemented in ways that narrowed practice and distorted priorities. Take reading, for example. The separation of decoding and comprehension has led to groups of children who, by the end of KS2, can read fluently but struggle to make meaning.

Composition over construction

The new Writing Framework risks a similar fate if we're not careful. Its emphasis on sentence construction is, in principle, sound. After all, just as a musician must practise scales to master their instrument, a writer must practise crafting sentences to develop fluency and control. But scales alone do not make music.

Without opportunities to perform – to play, to improvise, to connect with an audience – practice becomes sterile. Writing is no different. If we focus solely on transcription, we risk losing sight of the reader, the purpose, and the joy of communication.

The word tally within the framework is telling. Terms like 'sentence construction' appear with striking frequency, while words such as 'effect', 'reader', and 'purpose' are far less prominent. This imbalance could lead practitioners to crudely divide the curriculum as follows: KS1 becomes the time for transcription, and KS2 the time for composition. But writing doesn't work like that. Children don't suddenly

like robots; in other words, technically correct but devoid of voice, intent, or connection. Moreover, KS2 teachers will be left to pick up the pieces, having to retrain their pupils to see writing as a meaning-making process that should affect the reader through its messaging, rather than simply impress the marker through its technical accuracy.

Interpretation is key

This is not a call to abandon the framework. Far from it. It offers valuable guidance and a much-needed spotlight on the building blocks of writing. But we must implement it with nuance. Subject leaders, senior leaders, and classroom practitioners alike need to

than a meaningful act. Let's keep the reader at the heart of the writing process. Let's ensure that every sentence constructed is part of a larger whole: an idea, a story, a message worth sharing. And let's remember that whilst scales are essential, it's the music that moves us.

Practicalities

In order to help pupils structure their writing for meaning and purpose, try the following activities:

"A writer must practise crafting sentences to develop fluency and control"

become composers at age seven. They need to be immersed in meaningful writing experiences from the start – experiences that connect the mechanics of writing with its communicative power. Yes, accurate sentence construction matters. But accuracy for its own sake is not the goal.

Writing should be purposeful, contextual, and reader-aware. If we're not careful, we'll find ourselves training children to write

ask: What is the purpose of this activity? How does it help children become better communicators? Are we teaching writing as a craft, or merely as a set of rules?

With thoughtful implementation, the Writing Framework can help us raise standards and close gaps. But we must learn from the past. We must ensure that our interpretation of the guidance does not lead to unintended consequences, where writing becomes a mechanical exercise rather



Choose a reader first

We can enhance children's motivation through authentic experiences of sharing their writing with a real person or people – perhaps someone they know in their family or wider community. Without an audience or reader, children may consider a task to be low worth if they think they are only 'playing' at being a writer and that nobody – other than their teacher – will value their efforts.

Ensure your pupils have an authentic readership in mind for their writing, and that they know with whom it will be shared. If you can encourage them to picture this reader engaging with their words at the point of writing, their compositions will become more authentic, engaging and meaningful.

Read the room

Support pupils to recognise the function that grammar and vocabulary play in the readers' experience, linking all language choices back to the intended effect. You can build working walls and success criteria collaboratively with pupils, remembering to constantly refer back to the audience and purpose for the writing. For example, if you're writing a persuasive piece, you might list some techniques together as a class, first. Are the children trying to persuade a friend? An older family member? Or a stranger? How might they use approaches such as hyperbole, emotive language, and facts and figures to appeal to the reader they have in mind?

The power of proof reading

Sometimes a seeming lack of understanding of how to write grammatically correct sentences results from not knowing how to proofread. A handy technique, which could be taught to children in KS1 upwards, is to ask them, "How does your reader know where one idea ends and the next begins?" and then teach them the 'Guess What?' strategy (from Jennifer Serravallo's *The Writing Strategies Book*, (2017) page 331:

- Say "Guess what?" then read your sentence aloud.
- Does your sentence make sense as an answer to "Guess what?"?
- If not, try to rephrase it so that it makes sense.
- Reread it now that the sentence has been changed.
- Check it again – what do you say first?



DOWNLOAD RESOURCES AT



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Find FREE lesson plans, ideas and activities for KS2 persuasive writing at

tinyurl.com/tp-KS2persuasive

What does your reader need now that this idea has finished?

Not only does this approach provide children with a useful strategy for evaluating the completeness of their sentence construction, but it also reminds the writer to consider the reader in the writing composition process. Moreover, it reminds pupils that the purpose of honing accuracy is to ensure that a reader can make meaning from the text; in turn, this helps to prevent the unintended messaging that accuracy for the sake of accuracy is the end goal. **TP**



Penny Slater is partnership lead, and **Ellen Counter** is interim deputy lead adviser for primary English, both at HFL Education.

The science OF READING

For improvements in confidence and fluency, try the FASE approach, suggest **Doug Lemov**, **Colleen Driggs**, and **Erica Woolway**

When discussing reading pedagogy, we are often struck by the number of veteran teachers who have come to believe that writing about and discussing texts are more valuable classroom activities than actually reading (and enjoying) those texts. However, as Christopher Such explains, “This [children writing after reading] is a good way for the teacher to assess whether something has been understood, but it is the reading itself and the related discussion that best advances children’s ability to read.” He goes on to advise, “If in doubt, aim for roughly two-thirds of the lesson to comprise reading and one-third of the lesson to comprise discussion.”

FASE Reading can help structure this approach.

‘FASE’ stands for the type of reading the system is designed to reinforce: fluent, attentive, social, and expressive. It’s a consistent approach to having students read aloud so that they follow along and are always ready to read themselves, and it’s a critical tool to reinforce correct orthographic mapping and reveal and correct incorrect mapping.

Building fluency

In classrooms where FASE Reading is used effectively, reading is done joyfully with expression and care. At times, the teacher will model fluent and expressive reading – what we refer to as bridging – then ask students to do the same. Bridging involves teachers reading a short segment of text in between student readers. In a typical sequence of bridging, a teacher might have Arjun read for three sentences and then read one sentence herself. Then she might have Maria read four sentences and read two sentences herself before asking Nikki to read for six sentences before passing off to Joaquin, and so on.

The benefit of this method is that it moves the story along quickly and keeps the narrative thread alive, while supporting and maximising fluency and comprehension with interspersed models of teacher-quality expressive reading. Because students don’t know who will be called on to read, they all follow along attentively in the text – increasing the amount of quality road miles they get on the page. You can see these ideas in action in US teacher Christine Torres’s fifth

grade (Y6) class in *Christine Torres: Discovered* (tinyurl.com/tp-CTorresFASE).

Consistency is key

Just as reading aloud expressively is good for students, so too is prompting them to read expressively by calling their attention to text features, dialogue tags, and vocabulary that can give them cues for appropriate expression. Such prompting causes them to practise looking for the meaning in words and to pay attention to syntax and punctuation.

To make oral reading consistently more fluent, try the following strategies:

- **Capture the mood.**

As accuracy and automaticity improve, some students still struggle to read with appropriate expressiveness. You can combat this wooden reading by identifying (or asking students to infer) the kind of expression they should impart to the passage based on the general mood or on the affect of a specific character. Then ask them to apply it. In terms of general mood, it might involve asking a student to try to capture the tension of a key scene in the



way he reads it. In terms of a specific character's affect, a teacher might say, "Wilbur is upset, Diamond. Can you read that sentence in a way that shows that?" or "How is Wilbur feeling right now? What emotion is he feeling? Good . . . can you show me that in your reading?"

Asking students to capture the mood of a scene or character conveys to students that *how* they read a text matters. It also directly supports student comprehension. You can help students do this by calling their attention to dialogue tags and their role as 'stage directions.' For example: "The passage says, "I don't want any," Mr. Malone said sharply.' Read that again so his words are sharp." You can also model the applicable tone in your own reading by intentionally bridging around a dialogue tag and asking students to apply it to the sentence they are reading.

In this example, you might say the word *sharply* in a sharp tone of voice that students could then imitate.

- **Echo reading and choral reading.**

Literacy experts suggest echo reading – a teacher models how to read a word, phrase, or sentence, and a student echoes it back, trying to capture the same pronunciation and expression as the teacher – as a strategy to support more fluent reading. This is a practice that can be seamlessly incorporated into your FASE Reading. You might read a sentence and ask a student to begin their reading by echoing your sentence. For some children, this can

build their confidence in reading aloud in front of the class. You might also use echo reading to correct dysfluency. Model with the appropriate accuracy or prosody and then ask the student to repeat in order to reinforce stronger fluency. Similarly, you can rely on choral reading for particularly challenging, complex, or dramatic sentences. Rather than ask just one student to read, invite your whole class to copy your model.

- **Check the mechanics.**

Developing readers see punctuation but often do not grasp what it is telling them to do in terms of meaning or inflection. Similarly, the

that two ideas were in contrast helps them to improve their fluency and therefore their comprehension.

- **Read, then read again.**

Not only should we have students reread frequently to support comprehension, but we should also consider asking them to reread for fluency once they have successfully decoded and established the meaning of words and phrases in a sentence. There's strong evidence that repeated reading is among the most effective tools for building fluency. Even adult readers may need to read a complex passage or a sentence multiple times before it finally makes sense to them. Asking our students to do the same is an important way to support comprehension. By consistently enforcing your expectations and giving students multiple opportunities to read and reread a text, you can encourage students to build lifelong habits that make them fluent readers who love great (and complex) books. **TP**

"FASE is a consistent approach to having pupils read aloud so that they follow along"

importance of syntax – the relationship of the pieces of a sentence and its effect on meaning – is often lost on weak readers.

Making explicit references to punctuation and asking students to demonstrate their understanding of it in their oral reading is a useful way to build this important habit of attention. ("There's a comma there. Remember to pause"; "I want you to pause and breathe whenever you see a full stop"). For syntax, questions like asking students to identify which words told them that a sentence was a question or which words told them



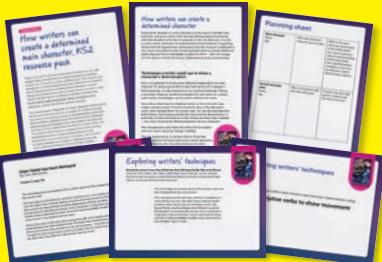
WAGOLL

Clem Fatale Has Been Betrayed by Eve Wersoocki Morris

Peer inside the mind of the author, and help pupils understand how to show a determined main character

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teachwire



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tinyurl.com/tp-Clem

Clem Fatale Has Been Betrayed is the first book in a new thrilling adventure series about Clem Fatale, the youngest gangster in the city, set in 1950s London. Readers enter a fast and funny world of crooked criminals, glamorous nightclubs, secret alleyways and fantastic fry-up breakfasts.

This story begins in the dead of night, when Clem and her dad Jimmy, a notorious jewel thief and leader of the Spider Gang, are on a heist. They're out to pinch the Fool's Canary, a rare yellow diamond belonging to the snooty Lord Weatherdale. But when Clem's dad vanishes on the job, the Spider gang have to scram.

Clem sets off into the London underworld to get her dad back and find out who double-crossed them. By her side is her prisoner/sidekick Gilbert (whom the Spiders accidentally kidnapped). Gilbert, who has spent most of his life indoors like a hot-house pot plant, is thrilled at the chance to go on a real adventure. Together with a Jamaican taxi driver called Winnie and Clem's childhood friend Konrad, son of a Polish pilot, the two unlikely friends race to save the day.

I'm dyslexic, and when I was at school I used to find some books very boring. So, when it comes to writing my own books, I add as many twists and turns

as I can to keep readers on the edge of their seats. Clem Fatale is stuffed full of action scenes – from escaping a grumpy barman, armed only with a vinyl record, to breaking into a fancy West End club.

The characters are always the most fun to write – from the cockney, geezer gangsters to the cold, cruel villainous businessman. But my favourite characters have to be Clem and Gilbert; they are as different as pigeons and poodles. Clem is tough, stubborn and rather prickly, but Gilbert is often naïve, cheerful and friendly. Clem will stop at nothing to find her dad, and her love, loyalty and determination make her the perfect main character.



Photo © Yellowbelly

Clem Fatale Has Been Betrayed (£7.99, Little Tiger) is out now.

HOW TO SHOW A DETERMINED MAIN CHARACTER

GIVE THEM SOMETHING WORTH FIGHTING FOR

When I create a new character, I make a character fact sheet. I draw a picture of them and scribble facts about them. For a determined character, it's important to know what is important to them: A friend? A parent? A pet?

GIVE THEM A MISSION

Once you know what your character cares about, take it away! Give them an

emotional drive that will keep them going throughout the adventure. It will make the character more likeable if they're driven by love, rather than selfishness.

ADD ENERGY

Use dramatic, energetic words to describe the character. For example, have them run rather than walk. Keep them moving forward in every scene.

DON'T MAKE IT TOO EASY

The most determined characters are the

ones who get knocked down and have to pick themselves back up. Think about mini challenges the character can face along the way.

GET IN THEIR HEAD

Once a determined main character makes a plan, they won't be able to think about anything else. You can show this in dialogue with other characters, or by describing your main character's own internal thoughts.



Extract from

Chapter 4,
page 23

Prologue

Picking a dramatic verb like 'charged' helps convey Clem's sense of urgency and speed.

The wild hedgerows towered above Clem and her captive as they charged down the country road.

Describing where the character is looking gives us a glimpse of her inner thoughts; both her mind and her eyes are on the future.

Clem kept glancing behind them, waiting for headlamps to come tearing into view.

She didn't know what the Spiders would do when they found out she'd done a bunk. She figured Monty would be disappointed, Whistler would be boiling about her pinching the witness, Screw would get in a flap about spies and double crossers watching the house, and Clem's mother probably wouldn't even notice that her only daughter had run away.

Short positive sentences show Clem's optimistic determination. The repetition of 'him' conveys how her mind is constantly focused on her dad. Even though the narrative is in third person, we get these windows into Clem's mind – a technique known as free indirect speech.

Clem set her eyes on the road and turned up the collar of her leather jacket. The jacket had been her dad's during the war. The seams were rubbed brown with French soil and the lining stained from sea-salt escapades – it was her battle skin. Tonight the jacket hung heavy round her shoulders like the comforting weight of her dad's hand. She'd find him. She wouldn't give up on him.

By having Clem imagine characters off scene, it brings them into the story – reminding the reader of the consequences of her running away and adding to the drama.

This metaphor shows us how Clem feels about her dad's jacket. It makes us think about the qualities someone needs when going into battle: bravery, skill and determination.

Their dialogue helps establish each character's motivation in this scene. Gilbert wants to stop (and have a good snooze) but Clem wants to carry on until she's finished the mission.

The boy Gilbert hobbled behind her. The treacherous walk across the narrow bridge over the Thames had made him quite lightheaded and his stomach was rumbling like a snoring dog.

"I say! so sorry to bother you," Gilbert called after Clem, "but could we have a breather? A quick break?"

"Quit stalling!" said Clem, without looking back. "Can't you walk and breathe at the same time? It's ten minutes until the town, then we'll pick up a cab. No stopping!"

This helps establish the characters' proximity to each other (where they physically are in relation to each other). The fact that Clem is in front of Gilbert shows their power dynamic: Clem is the leader and Gilbert is the follower.

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Illustrations © Patrice Aggs

No Refuge

Explore the plight of refugees, and how our communities can support those fleeing difficult circumstances, with Patrice Aggs and Joe Brady's stunning graphic novel

JO CUMMINS

No Refuge is the second graphic novel following siblings Hannah, Bea, and their little brother, Dom, who have been forced to flee their home during a civil war. They are desperately trying to reach their father, but the path through a now unfriendly land is fraught with danger. The story is told through the eyes of the children and, despite the bleak circumstances, has strong themes of kindness, solidarity and resilience, which will resonate with readers.

The artwork powerfully portrays the huge emotional toll the journey takes on the family, whilst highlighting their hope and determination to reach safety. Aggs' illustrations add a further layer of nuance to the story and echo the fear and uncertainty faced by its protagonists. The graphic novel format allows the visual storytelling to make complex issues such as displacement, empathy and global conflicts understandable and engaging for readers.

The story lends itself beautifully to helping pupils develop empathy for and an understanding of refugees as people, not just news headlines. In a world where political tensions are rising and democracy seems increasingly insecure, it is ever more important that children are given opportunities to strengthen their skills of critical thinking and allowed to discuss complicated ideas in a safe and guided way. There are also rich opportunities to develop the key skills of inference, prediction,





and interpretation, with strong curriculum links to English, PSHE, and global citizenship.

Activities

Cover exploration

I always like to introduce a new text by inviting children to explore the cover and engage in rich conversations based on their inferences and predictions. For example:

- *Title deconstruction* – What does the word ‘refuge’ mean? How does pairing it with ‘no’ affect its meaning? What questions does this raise about the predicament the main characters may find themselves in? Discuss the children’s ideas, then encourage them to write a short paragraph predicting some of the key events and themes within the book.

- *Setting clues* – For this, the children need to focus in very closely on some of the background details of the cover. What kind of place is the story set in? Calm or chaotic? Urban or rural? Are there any clues about the danger or displacement ahead?
- *Symbol hunt* – Again, focusing closely on the cover, pick out any items or details from the front cover and predict what they may symbolise. For example, barbed wire might represent danger or a barrier, and roads and pathways might suggest difficult choices or travelling to new places.

A great activity to help build inference skills is to ask the children to quietly look at the front cover and consider: What can they **see**? – What details stand out? (colours, characters, mood, objects). What do they **think**? – What do these details suggest about the story? What do they **wonder**? What questions about the story does the cover leave you with?



Take it further

It would be almost impossible to read *No Refuge* without some careful exploration of what refugees are (and are not). If you are looking to delve a little deeper, here are a few starting points to consider:

THINK-PAIR-SHARE

What is a refugee? Ask the children to think quietly about this, share with a partner, then share with the class. An adult should record the key ideas from their answers and help refine them into an accurate description as a group. Be sensitive to the fact that pupils will have different opinions on this topic depending

on views shared within the family home, news reports they may have encountered, or posts shared on social media. The classroom should be a safe space to gently challenge and deepen understandings in a sensitive way.

CREATE A CONNECTION

Use feelings-based questions to help children develop empathy and connect emotionally with the subject matter. For example: How would you feel if you had to leave your home suddenly? What would you take with you and why? What would you miss most? Whom would you worry about?

- *Panel-to-prose*. Choose a key sequence from the book to rewrite as a prose chapter. For example, the border crossing, family separation, or other moments of danger. Children will need to think about describing the setting and other sensory details, about how they are going to show the characters’ emotions, and how they will let readers know the characters’ internal thoughts. This task will help pupils understand how graphic novels are carefully structured to shape the pacing of events within the story.
- *Create dual-voice diary entries*. This activity challenges children

WALK IN SOMEONE ELSE'S SHOES

Give the children a scenario card saying: *A family wakes up to danger nearby. They have only a few minutes to decide what to do*. If the children were members of this family, what would their response be? Ask children to think about what decisions the family would face, whom they could trust, where they might try to go, and what challenges they might meet along the way. To consider this more deeply, organise the children into small ‘family’ groups and ask them to create three freeze-frames depicting the family as they wake and realise the danger, as



to consider the same event from two contrasting points of view, and helps them develop empathy for the characters and their differing perspectives.

Pupils need to consider the individual motivations of the characters, their emotions, and how their experiences of safety, fear, and hope may differ. For example, Hannah vs Bea when deciding whether to leave home or not.

- **Making a moral decision.** For this activity, children need to look at a scene where one of the characters needs to make a difficult choice (leaving home, trusting a stranger) and write a reflective piece in-role

they are on the point of leaving their home, and at a point in their journey. Remind children to think about how Aggs uses facial expression and body posture in her illustrations to convey emotions. Can pupils mirror this in their freeze-frames?

WHAT IF...?

These discussion prompts will help children link the global issue of people seeking refuge to their own locality. Their aim is to get the children thinking about what they would do if someone arrived at school needing their help. The outcome of this discussion could be to create posters to put around the setting

as the character. This should include explaining what they decided, their rationale, and the fears. Some drama work using the 'conscience alley' or 'interviewing in-role' techniques could support pupils with their writing here.

Visual stimuli

Graphic novels teach children to read pictures in the same way they would read printed text. They need to be able to glean meaning from images, symbols, layout and visual cues – all skills which are vital in today's online society. But of course, the pages themselves are all mini works of art! There are many ways in which art can be used to deepen the children's understanding of the characters and plot.

Create a 'missing' page.

The children could create an extra page with an extra scene to slip in between two existing pages. Encourage them to think carefully about using differently-sized panels to highlight key moments, the use of colour to convey mood, how the frames are going to move the story on, and what symbolic imagery they might want to include.

'The things we carry' collage.

Invite pupils to think about the objects the children take as they flee from their homes. Why do they take the items they do? What are their significance? What items would pupils take if they had to flee? Why? Challenge the children to create a mixed media collage that represents the objects they would take, and the memories carried inside. For example, a photo of a happy time, a teddy from when they were a baby,

displaying the class' values, or welcoming people to their school. Key questions: How do we treat someone who needs help? What are our school or community values? How would we want to be treated if we were in a refugee's position?

THINKING ABOUT PERSPECTIVE

Imagine there is a camera pointing at the images. Look at each frame on the page and think about where this 'camera' might be positioned. What effect does this create? As a general rule, close-ups are used to show emotions, long shots are used for settings, low angles looking up denote power, high angles looking down

Loved this? Try these...

- ❖ *When Stars are Scattered* by Victoria Jamieson & Omar Mohamed
- ❖ *Azzi in Between* by Sally Garland
- ❖ *Running Out of Time* by Simon Cox
- ❖ *Front Desk* by Kelly Yang
- ❖ *Who are Refugees and Migrants? What Makes People Leave Their Homes? And Other Big Questions* by Michael Rosen & Annemarie Young

a scarf that smells of their mother's perfume.

Body language study.

Aggs' illustrations show a whole range of emotions through gesture, face shape and posture. Ask the children to find examples in the panels of characters showing joy, fear, tiredness, anger, etc. Look at how Aggs has communicated those emotions without dialogue. Challenge children to redraw a panel, experimenting with altering the mood by changing characters' body language and facial expressions. **TP**



Jo Cummins is an experienced primary school teacher and English leader with a passion for children's books and mental health awareness.

She currently works for a specialist educational provision in Hampshire in a teaching and advisory role.

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show vulnerability. Challenge the children to redraw these frames from a different angle to see how the perspective changes. Or, they could recreate the frames as photos using a camera or tablet.

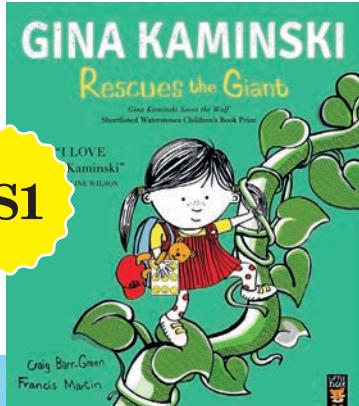
ROLE ON THE WALL

This is a fantastic technique to really get to know the characters in the story. To do this you need to draw the outline of a character on the wall. Inside the outline write their fears, feelings, and hopes. Outside the outline write pressures, dangers, obstacles and other external events. This could be revisited at multiple points within the story and be used to track character development.

Book CLUB



We review five new titles that your class will love



KS1



KS2



KS2

Gina Kaminski Rescues the Giant

by Craig Barr-Green & Francis Martin

(£7.99, Little Tiger)

This spirited young heroine lets everyone know what she thinks! On a school trip to the art gallery, Gina spends some time in the Reading Room and picks up a very familiar tale. According to Gina, the story of Jack and the Beanstalk is full of BIG mistakes and she's going to fix them! She communicates through her feelings chart with face emojis and by explaining to readers just what she's going to do to make sure the giant is treated fairly and not misunderstood as a villain. Starring a neurodiverse main character, this story is honest and illuminating – demonstrating strategies that help Gina communicate her feelings, her lovely relationship with a TA, and actions that make her trip to the art gallery a success.

The Snow Girl

by Sophie Anderson, ill. Melissa Castrillon

(£7.99, Usborne)

Sophie Anderson reimagines the traditional Russian tale of *The Snow Maiden* through a beautiful story of the magic of snow, friendship and overcoming fears. Tasha and her parents have gone to live on her grandpa's farm. When the first snow falls, they build a wonderful snow girl – the kind of friend Tasha wishes she could have. To her amazement, she discovers wishes on snow can come true. Each night, the Snow Girl comes to life. As Tasha spends time with this sparkling friend and learns more about the traditional stories of snow spirits, she realises she has powers of her own. She has a choice – to give in to the anxiety that overcomes her and stay in the shadows of winter, or push through the cold to find her strength and step out into a new season of courage and hope...

The Winter Snow Goose

by Gill Lewis, ill. Irina Augustinovich

(£7.99, Barrington Stoke)

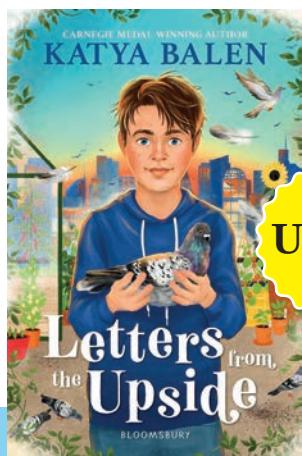
The fourth book in Gill Lewis's heart-warming educational series takes us to the end of summer, where Tia feels like everything is changing. Her mum, the island vet, shows her a flock of pink-footed geese who have migrated from the far north. Among them is an injured snow goose. Tia and her best friend Nat must work together to care for the snow goose through the winter. When storms prevent the ferry from bringing supplies from the mainland and the island loses power, the islanders come together to look after each other and share the stories of their lives. Through new traditions, Tia learns to welcome change and embrace new beginnings. This uplifting story contains dyslexia-friendly vocabulary, page tint and font, making it accessible for everyone.

→→→ **RECOMMENDED
RESOURCES**



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Sometimes it's the little things that can make the biggest difference, and this collection of basic (but evergreen) templates will save you precious hours. From research sheets and writing frames, to lesson and unit planners – plus oodles of artwork – you'll find all those teaching tools you use over and over again, yet somehow find yourself designing from scratch every time! Visit plazoom.com/collections/essential-templates



UKS2



KS2

Letters from the Upside
by Katya Balen

(£7.99, Bloomsbury)

Con is angry. His struggle to control the fire that rises up inside him results in terrible choices and broken friendships. It always comes back to one question: "Why did your dad leave?" Con can't give an exact answer, but he knows it has something to do with him. When he goes a step too far and punches a boy at school, Con is suspended. His neighbour, Mr Williams, takes him under his wing and introduces him to the Upside – a beautiful rooftop garden. As Con learns to 'look up' and see the world in a new way, he realises he doesn't want to live a life of destruction and makes the decision to change. *Letters from the Upside* reveals the healing power of nature as it takes readers on a journey of self-reflection and empathy.

Murder at Hotel Marvelo
by Ruth Lauren, ill. Federica Frenna

(£7.99, Piccadilly Press)

Finnian, Juniper and their incredibly creative little sister, Teddy, are left to protect their family's hotel when a wizard is discovered dead and their parents are arrested. Determined to prove their innocence, this fantastic trio must uncover clues, identify suspects and interview everyone from witches to griffins, all while avoiding the awful Mrs Weatherly who's been sent to care for them. Strange blueprints, secret passageways and unusual magic help them fit together the pieces of a very tricky puzzle! Themes of a blended family coming together and being true to yourself, even when you're not like everyone else, make this story extra special. Readers will be thrilled to discover this is only the beginning of an exciting new series!

Meet the author

RUTH LAUREN
**ON THE JOY OF 'WHAT IF?',
AND WHY NEURODIVERSITY
BELONGS IN EVERY STORY**



What were some of your inspirations for Hotel Marvelo?

I couldn't possibly have written a murder mystery

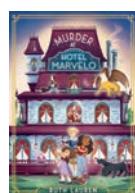
without Agatha Christie; she's a huge influence, so I can't not cite her. But the idea for this book first came to me after watching a John Wick film, in which The Continental is part of a chain of hotels that serves as a neutral ground for members of the underworld. A lot of stories begin with a 'what if?' and this one is no exception. What if there were a hotel for worn-out witches who just need a break? What if no magic were allowed in the hotel so overworked griffins could relax? And what if a magicide happened in this supposed haven, where a wizard was meant to be able to unwind, not find himself dead as a doornail in the spa?

Why did you want to write a story that featured neurodivergence, without plotting the entire story around it?

The simple answer to this is: because it's how my family and I live our lives. If I'm grocery shopping, I'm doing it while autistic. If I were solving an impossibly magical murder, I'd be solving it while autistic – just as Teddy is and just as Juniper is with ADHD. Children's lives (whether their own, their family's or their friends') feature neurodivergence, so the stories they read should, too. Our diagnoses are intrinsic to who we are, but the world goes on around us regardless. And if the world presents us with a mysteriously deceased wizard, then what are we to do but investigate?

How would you like teachers to use your book in the classroom?

You can read it to talk about blended family, friendship, facing change, finding out who we are, neurodiversity, or problem-solving. But most of all, read it for pleasure, because it's fun. Welcome to Hotel Marvelo!



Murder at Hotel Marvelo, by Ruth Lauren, illustrated by Federica Frenna (£7.99, Piccadilly Press), is out now.

WHY I LOVE...

ABOUT US:

NAME: Claire Davies

JOB TITLE:

Intervention lead and HLTA, St Bede's Catholic Primary School.

FAVOURITE FEATURE:

Clear, trackable data



Talking About: DREAMBOX READING PLUS PROGRAMME TO SUPPORT KEY STAGE 2

“How did you introduce Reading Plus?”

At St Bede's Catholic Primary School, we introduced DreamBox Reading Plus as part of a wider push to improve reading fluency, confidence and vocabulary across KS2. We wanted a programme that was adaptive, engaging and capable of supporting children with very different needs. Reading Plus was easy to set up, and pupils quickly understood how to navigate its personalised content. From the first few weeks, teachers could clearly see how the structured lessons and eye-movement guided reading supported pupils who previously found sustained reading challenging.

“How do you use Reading Plus day to day?”

Reading Plus is now embedded into our weekly timetable and has effectively replaced guided reading for many pupils. We use the programme during interventions and whole-class sessions, relying heavily on the live data dashboard to guide planning. The ready-made resources help us target specific skill gaps. Because the texts automatically adapt to each pupil's needs, progress is far more consistent than we have seen with other reading approaches.

“What difference has it made to progress?”

The impact of Reading Plus has been remarkable. In just six months, our pupils have made an average of 2.3 year-level gains in text complexity, something we've

Intervention lead and HLTA at St Bede's Catholic Primary School, Claire Davies, discusses the impact of DreamBox Reading Plus on literacy skills and reading for pleasure in school...



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never seen at this scale. In Year 6 especially, children who were previously working below Expected Standard in SATs practice are now achieving Greater Depth. Their confidence in answering text-based questions has transformed; they approach assessments independently, make inferences accurately and demonstrate much stronger stamina. We've also noticed a significant improvement in vocabulary, which feeds into writing and understanding across the curriculum.

“And what about the wider benefits?”

Reading Plus has helped us reignite a culture of reading for pleasure. Pupils enjoy the technology-led format, and many challenge themselves to increase their word count at home. Some weekends we see word totals rise by more than 20,000. Because vocabulary is systematically taught and reinforced, children are now far better equipped to access the wider curriculum and tackle more demanding texts. This improved proficiency is crucial for preparing them for secondary school, where reading complexity increases sharply.

WILL IT WORK FOR YOU?

- Boost SATs success – improve fluency, comprehension and independence in line with Year 6 expectations.
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- Support every learner – adaptive online lessons personalise reading instruction and provide targeted practice.
- Free training included – get unlimited customer support and CPD to help your school maximise reading impact.



An unlikely BEGINNING

Jennifer Bell explains how finding the right book set her off on a journey from reluctant reader to bestselling author

I absolutely love reading, and I seize every opportunity to immerse myself in a book.

My shelves are bursting with everything from dog-eared paperbacks to fancy collectable editions, and I have a towering to-be-read pile that seems to grow taller every day. You might think that as a full-time author who spent fifteen years as a children's bookseller, my passion for reading must always have been there. But believe it or not, I didn't enjoy reading at all as a child.

When I share this with young people, they often find it hard to believe. "I can prove it!" I say, showing them some of my childhood books scrawled with handwritten comments including, 'Warning: this book can be boring', and 'Only read if you are an adult'. I'm embarrassed to say that my copy of *Little Women* contains a moustachioed illustration of Louisa May Alcott, and I even wrote 'Poo' in *Prince Caspian*.

Heavy going

The trouble was, as a child, reading felt like a chore. This was partly because, in both primary and secondary school, I was encouraged to read books that challenged me. I distinctly remember how, when I was 10 years old, my teacher assigned me *Northanger Abbey* by Jane

Austen to tackle over the summer. It turned out to be a miserable task. Just getting through the first few pages felt incredibly laborious. The book held little appeal for me: the language was unfamiliar, and I couldn't connect to the experiences of a corseted seventeen-year-old girl attending balls and reading Gothic novels. I was a Spice Girls-obsessed 10-year-old, who loved video games and Pokémon.

I continued to dislike reading throughout school and university; I only picked up the books required for my classes and never sought out anything to read in my free time. However, that changed in my early 20s when I received a copy of *Eragon*, a young adult fantasy novel by Christopher Paolini. Stuck on a long coach journey with nothing else to occupy my time, I decided to give it a try.

A life-changing read

Eragon was refreshingly easy to read and incredibly entertaining. I had never read fantasy before, but the story completely captivated me. It made me realise that a compelling story can pull you along without making you feel like you're doing any work. After exploring many different genres at my local library, I discovered I loved



books and became the reader I am today. Crucially, I learned that it isn't always a great book that gets you into reading; it's a great reading experience.

And this is something that looks different for everyone.

When I talk to reluctant readers today, I encourage them to seek out the right book for *them*. If they're unsure where to start, I ask them to consider the stories from their favourite TV shows, movies and video games. With a little searching, they're bound to find a book that contains the same story elements they love. This is one of the many reasons it's so important that young people have access to libraries and bookshops.

These spaces not only offer a diverse array of books, but also have knowledgeable librarians and booksellers who can provide valuable recommendations. It's essential for reluctant readers to have the freedom to choose the stories that resonate with them, whatever those may be.

When I started writing for children, I thought about

DOWNLOAD RESOURCES AT

teachwire

Download **FREE** Magcalia character activities at

tinyurl.com/tp-Magcalia

that 10-year-old who had been put off reading. I was determined to create books that featured accessible language and compelling narratives – stories that were relatable, thrilling and, most importantly, exemplified the joy of reading for entertainment, not as hard work. **TP**



Jennifer Bell left bookselling in 2018 to become a full-time children's author. Her latest novel, *Magcalia: Thief of Shadows*, is the second book in an exciting new fantasy series.

@jenbellauthor

Jennifer.Bell.Author



Your school or youth group can make wishes come true!

Do you know a school or youth group who could fundraise and make a difference? Wishes have the power to rescue the magic of childhood and provide an invaluable lifeline to critically ill children and their families.

For more information check out our website at make-a-wish.org.uk, call our fundraising team on **01276 40 50 60** or email fundraising@makeawish.org.uk



Fundraising fitness challenge

You could try a sponsored star jump or host a sports day or tournament. You could have a fun run or walk and encourage parents to get involved!

Bake-A-Wish

Whether your bakes are star shaped, or you have star sprinkles, let your imagination run wild! Have a bake sale to raise funds for wishes.

Wear what you wish

Have a non-uniform day at school and have everyone donate to take part. Make it fun - why not have a pyjama or themed day!

Make-A-Wish Foundation® UK. Charity Registration Numbers:
England and Wales 295672 | Scotland SC037479

GROW YOUR OWN POTATOES

Join GYOP 2026 – Inspiring Children to Grow, Learn & Taste!

Every registered class receives a FREE growing kit in February, perfect for chitting and starting your potato-growing journey as soon as spring arrives. Each kit comes with full how-to instructions and access to ready-made downloadable classroom resources, so no growing experience is needed — everyone can take part with confidence.

Alongside the popular Heaviest Yield Competition, this year schools have the opportunity to win extra prizes throughout the growing season, giving every school an equal chance to shine—whether your crop is bumper or modest.

Hands-on, curriculum-friendly, and fantastic fun for pupils of all ages.

Get involved and watch the learning take root!

SIGN YOUR CLASS UP
for the 2026 *Grow Your Own Potatoes* project before **30 January 2026.**

“The look on the children faces was one of the greatest moments of my teaching career. All children should experience this”



Register for GYOP
Teach your class how to grow Potatoes

www.growyourownpotatoes.org.uk

Event DETAILS

What is Bett?

Bett is the largest edtech exhibition in the world, taking place each year in different locations across the globe, including the UK, Brazil and Asia. From global tech companies to renowned education brands to startups, you can find solutions for all education settings, challenges and budgets.

Where is Bett UK?

ExCeL London,
Royal Victoria Dock

When is Bett?

21-23 January 2026

How do I register?

Head over to
uk.bettshow.com/visit
and select your ticket



FRESH PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICAL TOOLS

Bett is back with a bang, and the lineup for 2026 is as jam-packed as you'd expect from the world's biggest edtech show. So sit back and take a sneak peek at what's in store...

After a record-breaking 2025, with a 23 per cent surge in educator attendance and the largest exhibitor showcase in our 40-year history, we're raising the bar once again.

Our most exciting programme yet is here, packed with trailblazing thinkers and innovators exploring one powerful theme: learning without limits. Featuring Hannah Fry, Amol Rajan, Vivienne Stern MBE, Ofsted, and many more sector-leading voices, this year's line-up will spark bold conversations on AI, digital strategy, skills, careers, esports and everything shaping the future of learning.

Across every corner of education, you'll discover fresh perspectives, practical tools and free CPD designed to transform your practice and inspire meaningful change across your institution. From the big debates that challenge the status quo, to hands-on sessions offering actionable takeaways, Bett UK 2026 has been carefully curated to equip every visitor with the clarity,

confidence and creativity needed for the future, including...

WOMEN IN EDTECH

Bett is committed to elevating diverse voices, and our Women in Edtech initiative returns refreshed and expanded for 2026. This influential space celebrates the women shaping the future of edtech, from founders and innovators to classroom leaders, researchers and policymakers.

The Women in Edtech

Mentoring Circles return for 2026 after a hugely successful launch last year. Designed as a supportive, safe space for women across both education and tech, the circles bring peers together to share experiences, offer advice and build meaningful connections. Whether you're a woman in the sector or an ally championing female leadership, the Mentoring Circles provide an invaluable opportunity to learn, connect and grow.

COMMUNITY-LED SPACES

Education thrives on community and Bett UK 2026 shines an even brighter spotlight on the peer-to-peer connections that make our sector special. Back by popular demand, the MSP Village and SEND Village return for 2026. These vibrant, community-led spaces were created to bring peers together around shared challenges and real-world opportunities. Curated with partners, educators and experts, these hubs offer networking, content, workshops and rich resources in an environment built on collaboration and shared purpose.

Whether you're exploring solutions to immediate challenges, scouting what's next in edtech, or looking to sharpen your vision for long-term transformation, Bett UK 2026 is your chance to connect, learn and lead. Educators go free – get your tickets now at uk.bettshow.com/visitor-registration



• A Hyve Event

ExCeL London
21 - 23 January 2026

Tickets for
Bett UK 2026 are
**FREE FOR
EDUCATORS!**



The world's biggest week of *EDUCATION!*

Join us for the biggest week in education from **21-23 January 2026** at the **ExCeL, London**. Last year, we made history with our biggest show yet, we can't wait to welcome the global education community back for an event like no other.

With immersive workshops, thought-provoking speakers, hundreds of hours of CPD accredited content, cutting-edge technology and unrivalled networking, there's no opportunity quite like it for educators!

bett | TableTalks

• A Hyve Event

Take part in peer-led discussions to inspire change and spark new ideas within your institution. Each session will be selected prior to the show based on your primary topics of interest. There's nothing more powerful than peer-to-peer discussion!

bett | Connect

• A Hyve Event

Want to discover the right solutions for your learners in a fraction of the time? Using data and technology we make critical connections between education decision makers and solution providers, taking the 'work' out of networking.

bett | Tech User Labs

• A Hyve Event

Our most popular programme, Tech User Labs, is back and taking to the show floor! With free sessions at Bett UK 2026, you'll learn how to get the most out of your current tech and explore emerging innovations within education - there's no CPD opportunity quite like it!



All content sessions
at Bett UK 2026 are
CPD accredited



LEARNING WITHOUT LIMITS

This year's theme is focusing on the sheer power of education in all areas of life, and Bett's portfolio director stopped by to talk about what it means to the team

Education is humanity's greatest promise and our most urgent mission.

It is the mission that every learner, everywhere, will have the chance to discover their brilliance, shape their future, and make their mark on the world. A promise that knowledge will not be hoarded but shared. That opportunity will not be rationed but opened wide. That learning will not stop at any age, border, or barrier.

Education is the spark that ignites curiosity. It is the bridge between cultures, the engine of innovation, and the compass that guides us through uncertain times. From the first crayon scribble to the final graduation cap, from apprenticeships to reinvention in mid-life, learning shapes who we are and who we dare to become. Every day, in classrooms, workshops, homes and communities across the world, educators turn obstacles into opportunities, technology into tools, and lessons into life-changing moments. They prove that innovation is not just found in code or circuitry, but in creativity, compassion, and courage.

Learning without limits is more than a theme, it is a movement. It is the will to tear down the walls that block learning walls of inequality, inaccessibility, and outdated thinking. It is the vision to reach every learner, whether in a crowded city school, a rural village, or a refugee camp. It is the power to unite human connection with the tools of tomorrow, AI, XR, and ideas not yet imagined, so education does not simply keep pace with the future but shapes it.

At Bett, we celebrate those who make this real: the community-built learning centre on the edge of São Paulo, alive with music, science, and hope. The rooftop school in Kuala Lumpur where pupils harvest rainwater to cool their lab, learning that science can solve problems they



see from their own windows.

The community college in San Diego where veterans, artists, and engineers share the same workshop, each learning a new craft. The adult learning centre in East London where parents study for degrees alongside their children's homework hour.

Learning without limits means no learner left unseen, unheard, or underestimated.

It means the courage to combine the heart of teaching with the power of technology we have yet to invent. It means refusing to accept that where you are born determines how far you can go. This January at Bett, we gather not just to showcase what's new, but to ignite what's next.

We are here to inspire, to challenge, and to commit to building a world where learning knows no boundaries. You are part of this mission. Whether you teach, lead, or spark curiosity at the kitchen table, you carry the promise forward every day.

Better education for all is not just our goal, it is our shared responsibility, our greatest opportunity, and our boldest promise. Because when everyone can learn without limits, there is no challenge we cannot meet, and no future we cannot build together.

This is our moment. This is our demand.

Let's make learning limitless.



Duncan Verry is portfolio director at Bett.

teach PRIMARY RECOMMENDS

Support Heart Month



Every February, the nation comes together for British Heart Foundation's Heart Month. In the UK, sadly around 50,000 school children are living with a heart condition. This Heart Month, we need your support to help us fund lifesaving research into cardiovascular disease to help improve the lives of children like Alba.

Alba, now aged 7, was born with a congenital heart condition called transposition of the great arteries. She underwent her first heart surgery at one hour old. Alba was also diagnosed with pulmonary stenosis and will need further heart surgery.

Keep us beating by organising a simple classroom activity, walking challenge or your own fundraising event to fund lifesaving research. To find out more, scan the QR code or search BHF DYOT Schools.



Accessible health

Finalist in the Bett Awards 2026 Wellbeing Resources category, MELVA is gaining national recognition for its innovative response to the growing children's mental health crisis. With one in five children experiencing a diagnosable mental health condition, schools need accessible, engaging solutions. MELVA uses playful storytelling and practical activities, led by the character Melva Mapletree, to help pupils understand anxiety, grief, and emotional regulation. Designed for whole-class use, it builds emotional literacy, resilience and shared language over time. Alongside ready-made PSHE resources, MELVA provides training, evaluation tools and staff support, helping schools nurture pupil wellbeing and teacher confidence. Visit melva.org.uk

WHAT'S ON IN 2026?



teach PRIMARY RECOMMENDS

Be part of a better education system



NAHT represents over 50,000 serving school leaders in early years, primary, secondary and special schools, making us the largest trade union exclusively for school leaders in the UK. NAHT is democratically run and supports its members through offering unparalleled protection and representation. We use our voice at the highest levels of government to influence policy for the benefit of leaders and learners everywhere. Alongside our members, we work to create a better education system for both educationalists and students alike. Visit naht.org.uk

Revolutionise Shakespeare

The Shakespeare Curriculum is the next generation in Shakespeare teaching resources, giving everything you need to design and deliver your classes for KS3 - 4, all in one intuitive platform.

Hundreds of schools have already joined the teaching Shakespeare revolution with the Shakespeare Curriculum. It distils the RSC's award-winning teaching approaches into a new digital platform, with over 2,000 resources that can radically transform the way Shakespeare is taught and learned about. Visit us at BETT to find out how you can use everything the Shakespeare Curriculum to offer, so you can spend less time planning and more time inspiring.

shakespearecurriculum.com

Find us at Bett stand number SM84



This year's show is set to introduce some brand-new elements, as well as bringing back firm favourites. Use the guide below to start planning your route (and don't forget your comfy shoes...).

INTRODUCING EDTECH 10

New this year, we're unveiling the Edtech 10 List, a celebration of 10 trailblazing females redefining the next era of education technology. This list goes beyond recognition; it's a platform to highlight impactful work and success stories of women revolutionising the edtech landscape. Being part of this initiative means inspiring others and connecting with fellow innovators. Join us as we recognise their achievements live at Bett UK 2026.

TECH USER LABS

One of last year's standout programmes, Tech User Labs were oversubscribed by more than 400 per cent. So in 2026, we're making them bigger, better and more accessible by moving them directly onto the show floor. These 45-minute, hands-on sessions are your chance to experience real solutions in real time from Intel, Kahoot, Microsoft, ASUS and many more. Learn how to get more from your existing tools, test new products, troubleshoot pain points and build your institution's digital confidence. Slots for Tech User Labs fill fast, so get your ticket and sign up now!

THE AGE OF AI

Bett is one of the best places to explore how technology is transforming classrooms and empowering educators. And the tech of the moment? AI of course. Hear Dawn Taylor on redefining the teacher's role in the age of AI and Mark Martin on how schools can join AI Awareness Day 2026 to build digital literacy and creativity. If that's not enough, Hannah Fry and Amol Rajan will be looking at the big picture in the Main Arena, and discussing how AI is transforming society as a whole.

Find more agenda highlights at uk.bettshow.com/agenda-highlights

Serve up some fun this lunch time!

Get pupils active and talking

Our concrete table tennis tables are the perfect addition to your school playground. They transform breaktimes into opportunities for fun, social interaction and physical activity.

Why choose concrete table tennis tables for your school?

- **Encourages active lunchtimes** - a fun, fast-paced sport that gets students moving.
- **Promotes social connection** - table tennis brings pupils together across year groups and abilities.
- **Improves outdoor spaces** - stylish, permanent features that enhance playgrounds.
- **Built to last** - vandal-resistant, weatherproof concrete for year-round play.
- **Inclusive and accessible** - easy to learn, loved by beginners and experienced players alike.

Make every breaktime a hit

Invest in something that keeps pupils engaged, happy and healthy – without ongoing costs or maintenance.

Serve up fun that lasts.



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Playcrete also manufactures and installs skateparks, scooter parks, parkour parks, picnic tables and benches



I have secret plans and clever tricks...

ROALD DAHL'S THE ENORMOUS CROCODILE

THE MUSICAL

Roald Dahl's wickedly funny musical adventure is heading out on a UK tour from March 2026.

Schools rates are available – visit ENORMOUSCROCODILEMUSICAL.COM for a full list of venues.

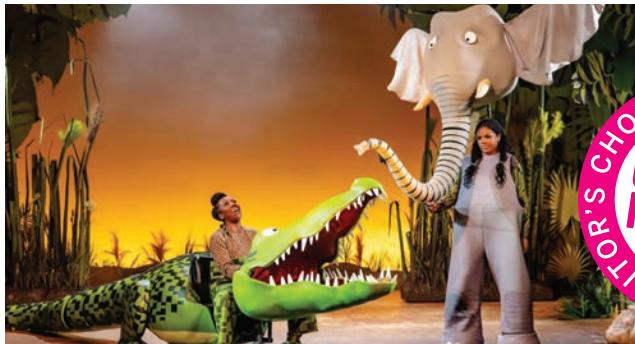
For ages
3+



© 2025 RDSC Illustration by Laura Cappellari

Top of the class

Resources and activities to bring fresh inspiration to your classroom



1 Snap!

The Enormous Crocodile is weaving his way across the UK in search of delicious little fingers and squidgy podgy knees... Only the other jungle creatures can foil his secret plans and clever tricks, but they're going to have to find a large amount of courage to stop this

greedy brute. This mischievous musical based on Roald Dahl's snappy book is heading out on its first UK tour in 2026. Perfect for those aged 3+, The Enormous Crocodile offers a wickedly funny musical adventure for those of nursery and primary school age.

Find out more at enormouscrocodilemusical.com



3

Hands-on history

Bring history to life for your pupils at the Last Days of Pompeii immersive exhibition, a captivating journey back in time! Using cutting-edge technology, this award-winning experience offers an interactive exploration of ancient Roman life in Pompeii before the volcanic eruption.

Hands-on activities, captivating storytelling, and stunning visual displays come together to nurture curiosity and inspire a love for history. Don't miss the chance to ignite your students' imagination and enrich their learning! Reserve your class visit today and witness the wonders of Pompeii first-hand. Open until 15 March 2026 at Immerse LDN, Excel London Waterfront. Special rates available for school groups.

Find out more at pompeii-experience.com

4 Wraparound care without the daily juggle

For busy school leaders, wraparound care can quickly become a drain. Premier Education turns it into a strength. We take the whole thing off your plate: staffing, safeguarding, planning, bookings, parent communication, every last bit.

You get the calm; children get the fun.

Our fully managed, Ofsted-compliant wraparound care slots into your school effortlessly, delivering active, confidence-boosting sessions filled with movement, laughter and joy. As one headteacher told us, our provision is "reliable, engaging and invaluable for our families."

No stress. No chaos. Just Happy Kids.

Healthy Futures.

Find out more at tinyurl.com/tp-PremierEdWraparound



2 Introducing online AP for KS2

Academy21, the UK's leading online alternative provision experts and a DfE-accredited provider, has extended its offer to Key Stage 2 learners. Working in partnership with schools, the service supports attendance strategies and a range of learner needs, including children on flexible timetables or waiting for specialist placements. Early intervention helps pupils stay on track, develop core skills and become secondary-ready, with curriculum content aligned to SATs preparation. For schools, it acts as a trusted partner, supporting existing provision and easing pressure on internal capacity. Find out more at academy21.co.uk/primary



5

We The Curious

If you're looking for a day out of the classroom that will spark curiosity in STEM, check out Bristol's playful and surprising science experience, We The Curious. The science centre on Bristol's harbourside is home to the UK's only 3D Planetarium, while its two floors are brimming with interactive exhibits exploring illusions, sound, space, food, animation and much more.

Combine a visit to the exhibition floors with an awe-inspiring trip around the Solar System in the Planetarium and a choice of curriculum-linked shows and workshops on everything from fossils to forensics, chemistry to climate change.

To find out more, email education@wethecurious.org or visit www.wethecurious.org

Teach them to read between the headlines

New Media & Information Literacy TeachKit

83%
of teachers
say Media and
Information Literacy
is important or very
important*



Our TeachKit provides everything you need to equip pupils with the skills to navigate today's complex information landscape – and grow into confident, responsible creators, contributors, and sharers.

"The layout allows the teacher to feel secure that the children will gain useful skills, knowledge and the ability to make informed choices; while at the same time giving the teacher the security that they are using a trusted resource."

Mrs. Harmer, Year 6 Primary School Teacher

*First News survey 2025.

Download the free primary framework



Based on frameworks created with the
Media and Information Literacy Alliance.





WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- How to design and construct a robust framed structure from wood
- How to choose and apply materials for weatherproofing a model shelter
- How to incorporate a simple mechanism to create a working entrance
- How to collaborate in a team, think critically and test design ideas

Build a weather-proof shelter for a Lego figure



Combine construction skills and materials knowledge to build a hideout for a mini fugitive, with **Marc Bowen**

 raglanciwcprimary.co.uk

The rain drummed on our classroom windows as I recounted the tale of the Chartist Caves – real 19th-century hideouts used by political rebels in the Welsh hills. Pupils were inspired by the thought of torchlight meetings, deep underground, while soldiers scoured the ground above. That spark of an idea ignited an ambitious challenge: designing and constructing a camouflaged, weatherproof hideaway fit for a mini fugitive. This project could also easily take on the context of other historical or literary figures in need of a hiding spot; perhaps Peter Pan seeking to evade Captain Hook!



START HERE

From my experience, every memorable lesson starts with a good hook. In our case, it was the locally relevant story of the Chartist Caves in South Wales – limestone caverns said to have concealed Welsh Chartist rebels plotting their 1839 uprising, as well as protecting their supplies for long periods on the run. The historical drama immediately set the scene for our design brief. To replicate this spark in your own classroom, you might use any authentic context where someone needs a secret shelter: a fictional hero hiding from villains, a local smugglers' cave, or much-needed protection in a survival situation. The key is to give the pupils a purpose – in our case it was to keep their tiny (Lego) inhabitant safe, dry and unseen! A quick slideshow of cave photos and camouflaged animal habitats fuelled pupils' imaginations, and they were soon itching to get onto the designing.



MAIN LESSON

1 | DESIGN

Split the class into teams, and explain that each team will build a model hideout capable of concealing a Lego minifigure and protecting it from the elements. We co-constructed the criteria as a class: the structure had to be sturdy, waterproof, and have a working door for our mini Chartist to get in, as well as being camouflaged well enough to blend into the environment.

2 | MAKE

Begin construction with the frame. Using self-measured and cut lengths of square section wood, dowel and lollipop sticks, guide children to build small frame structures

as the skeleton of their hideouts. I really enjoyed seeing pupils applying learning from previous lessons about strong shapes, here – several groups opted for triangular supports or cross-braces to strengthen their walls. PVA glue is perfect for these projects when combined with a little masking tape to provide stability while the glue sets. Encourage the early-stage problem-solving moments, as these can help foster true collaboration; I found that children started naturally moving between tables to check out and learn from each other's techniques.

With your basic wooden frameworks in place, the next challenge is to create a natural-looking form. Use sheets of flexible wire mesh for pupils to bend and shape

“This project could easily take on the context of historical or literary figures in need of a covert base of operations”



around their frames, which will allow each hideout to take on an irregular, organic profile, instead of looking like a simple wooden box.

Choosing an outer covering can be a great opportunity to explore the properties of materials. It's a good idea to have a selection of off-cut materials to hand – strips of old plastic tarpaulin, waxed fabric, thick foil, and supplies for traditional papier mache. Have each team decide which covering would best keep rain out, and how to attach it securely to their mesh.

It goes without saying that no secret hideout is complete without a working entrance to sneak your LEGO figure in and out. Demonstrate two simple mechanisms on the whiteboard, first: a basic

lever-operated door (think of a tiny drawbridge that could pivot up and down), and an axle-based pivot (a door or hatch raised and lowered when a string is coiled/uncoled). Every group can use these principles to invent their own unique doorways, all aiming to end up with a closable entrance.

Once structures are built and sealed, the final touch is camouflage, where artistry meets subterfuge! Provide paints in murky greens, browns, and greys (or link to art lessons and have pupils create their own hues). Children can also mix sand into their paint to add gritty texture like mud and stone, or add on bits of dried leaves, moss and twigs collected from around the playground.

3 | TEST

Now for the moment of truth – testing time! Move outside for a simulated rainstorm, and ask each team to pop their LEGO person inside their hideout to await their fate. Pour the exact same amount of water over each hideout's top, one after the other, to fairly compare waterproofing. Encourage the children to observe where the leaks (if any) occur – seams between materials are a common culprit – and to think of design solutions. Next, unleash an electric hairdryer on a high setting to mimic strong wind and sun, testing each model's sturdiness. Then reflect as a class upon which hideouts stayed completely dry, which withstood the wind without losing parts, and why.

To really embrace the spirit of the challenge, children can hide their camouflaged hideouts around the school grounds. We chose a variety of nooks and crannies – under bushes, behind tree stumps, nestled against the building – and left them there for the school week. After five days braving the real weather, each team can open up their shelter and reflect on which design choices worked best and what they'd improve next time. Common themes may include: the importance of overlapping waterproof layers, using stronger joints, and better anchoring of camo materials.

Crucially, every child should get to celebrate some success – whether their hideout stayed completely dry, withstood the wind, or was the hardest to spot.

Marc Bowen is a deputy head and primary teacher in South Wales.

EXTENDING THE LESSON

- Cross-curricular writing or drama: have pupils write a short story, diary entry or news report from the perspective of their hideout's inhabitant. What was it like hiding in there?
- Material science investigation: build on the testing by having the class design a fair experiment around waterproofing or durability.
- Real-life den building: if you have access to a forest school area or even just a school field, challenge pupils to translate their model ideas into a child-sized shelter or den using natural materials, tarps, and rope.

USEFUL QUESTIONS

- Have I checked the risk assessment requirements for my setting when using junior hacksaws, glue guns, wire cutters for mesh – accordingly, have I planned a safety briefing for the pupils?
- Do the pupils have the necessary background knowledge? It helps if children have some prior experience with simple mechanisms (like basic levers or hinge ideas) and understand the concept of fair testing.
- Do we have untouched areas of the school grounds where we can base our hideouts, away from inquisitive little hands?



WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- That monochrome is a word that can be used to describe a picture that is created using only a single colour

- To draw carefully with control using pen
- To draw from observation (the locality) and imagination (the impact of the wintery weather)

Can you see the world through winter's eyes?



Stay wrapped up warm in the classroom while creating these striking wintery views through a window, with **Adele Darlington**

[@adele.darlington](https://www.instagram.com/adele.darlington/) [tinyurl.com/tp-AdeleDarlington](https://www.linkedin.com/in/tp-AdeleDarlington/)

The chilly January days have us reaching for hats, gloves and scarves in preparation for the icy air, snow at breaktimes, and freezing commutes between home and school.

This art lesson gives pupils (and teachers) the opportunity to think about this cold weather in terms of its beauty, whilst staying nice and warm indoors. Grab paper, glue and pens instead of those thick winter layers, and think about the changes snow and ice make to the look and feel of the neighbourhood, before creating beautiful, monochromatic artwork representing it.



START HERE

Begin the lesson by discussing your local area. Talk as a class, in groups or with a partner: what significant features and landmarks are there unique to the school, village, town or city?

Think about the architectural style of the buildings, the trees in the school grounds or lining the nearby streets, the shops, religious buildings, leisure centres or sports grounds. What do they look like on mild spring, warm summer or breezy autumnal days? How does this appearance change in the chilly depths of the wintertime, when temperatures drop, snow starts to fall, and the days get shorter and darker?



MAIN LESSON

1 | COMPOSE IT

The artwork created during this lesson is a chilly view out of a window from a cosy indoor space. It can be a view of an urban or rural local scene; one with which pupils are familiar in the midst of wintertime. Drawing on the discussions from the beginning of the lesson, ask pupils to compose several different ideas for the artwork in their sketchbooks. Thumbnail sketching is a fun and effective way to do this. As the name suggests, thumbnail sketches are small (like a thumbnail but not quite as tiny), quick

drawings that artists create to help them visualise their work and ideas before committing to larger, final canvases. These sketches aren't detailed; they are just a way to map out different compositional arrangements prior to creating an artwork. Ask pupils to draw out several small rectangles (approximately 5cm x 7cm) on their sketchbook page to fill with different ideas for their view from the window. What can they see? Will it be houses and shops or fields and trees? Encourage them to play about with both portrait and horizontal compositions. They'll then need to choose one as a final design to use. Having conversations with peers about their sketches and

“This lesson gives you and your pupils the chance to think about winter in terms of its beauty”



which they think will transfer best to the larger piece of paper can help this decision-making process.

2 | DRAW IT

Children can create their drawings at different scales; it's up to you and your class to make the decision on how big you want them to be. You can use A4 or A5 white paper, or even A6 to make mini masterpieces. At this stage in the lesson, as well as the paper, pupils only need a black pen to draw with. Handwriting pens or felt tip pens are ideal. This artwork can be described as monochromatic, which means it is created using



only one colour; in this case, black. Pupils should use their thumbnail sketch as a guide and draw out their wintery scenes, taking care to fill all the space on the paper. Once the basic shapes are drawn, they can then add interesting

details to their compositions such as birds in the trees, people walking on the pavement, items in a shop window, bricks on a wall, footsteps in the snow or snowmen in a field. Once children are happy with the drawing as a whole, it's time to move onto the final stage – making the window.

3 | FRAME IT

To create the window frame, pupils need black sugar paper, scissors, a pencil and a ruler. The black paper needs to be the same size as the paper used to draw the outdoor scene on. Using a ruler, guide the children to measure out four rectangles to replicate the panes of glass in a window frame; two at the top and two at the bottom. Folding the paper into quarters prior to drawing out the panes acts as

a guide and helps the positioning of each pane on the paper. Once they've drawn the frame, pupils should cut out the panes using scissors. They will then be left with the black paper with four rectangular holes in it. The final step is to attach the two pieces together – the view and the window. Pupils should carefully apply glue to the black paper frame, line it up against their drawing and stick it down. It's then time to step back and admire the view!

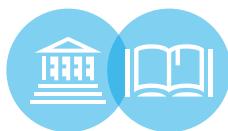
Adele Darlington is an experienced teacher, art lead and primary art consultant. She is the also the author of 100 Ideas for Primary Teachers: Art published by Bloomsbury.

EXTENDING THE LESSON

- Have a go at repeating this art lesson at three further points during the year, creating the view through a window during each season. Create different displays of each in the classroom or display them all together at the end of the school year to form a spectacular show of the seasonal changes in the local area.
- Write descriptive poems to sit alongside the artwork. Lines such as *snow falling, ice glistening* and *trees shivering* can really bring the drawn scenes to life.
- Have a go at drawing the same view using different media. Try paint, oil pastel or charcoal. The possibilities are endless!
- If you're lucky enough to get snow, wrap up warm and take your class outside with iPads to capture the weather's effect on the school grounds.

USEFUL QUESTIONS

- How does your artwork make you feel?
- Do you think adding colour to your picture would change this feeling?
- How would a spring, summer or autumn view through a window differ from the one you have drawn in this lesson?

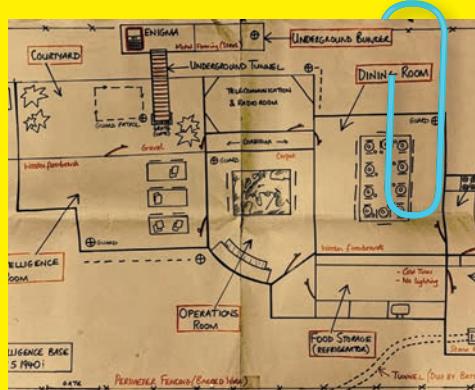


WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- Who Alan Turing was, and what he achieved during the Second World War
- What the Enigma machine was, and the role it played in WW2
- How to combine ideas to find a solution
- Vocabulary to best describe movement

START HERE

Introduce to the children a large-scale blueprint map of a fictional base in World War 2 Germany (you can draw your own, or find a printable map at the link on the right). This is a great hook to pique interest and intrigue... do pupils know what the map could show, or when it could be from? Encourage the children to look at the map thoroughly, and think about what it could be used for, before introducing the context of WW2 and the Enigma machine. Although this will be the main inspiration for the writing focus in the lessons that follow, for now it is a tool to engage, excite and provide a context.



Become a spy and help crack Enigma...



Explore an intriguing World War 2 coding context through teamwork and narrative writing, with **Karl Duke**



@karlduke8@bsky.social

Over the years, I've found that one setting that always provides an intriguing context for writing is the events of World War Two. The work of Alan Turing and his collaborators at Bletchley Park is part of our history focus, but their incredible achievements also serve as perfect inspiration for a fictional writing mission for children in Year 5 and 6. The gameplay element of this lesson is influenced by the first-person perspectives children may play on tablets and consoles and is one reason, I believe, why it draws such enthusiasm from all the classes I've taught.



MAIN LESSON

1 | INTRODUCING ENIGMA

To begin, tell pupils that they will be learning about Alan Turing and his decoding work at Bletchley Park. Share an image of an Enigma machine. Explain that during World War 2, Germany used these machines to send and receive secret messages. Guide a discussion, asking, *What could have been included in these messages? Who would have sent them and to whom? Could they have been a danger to allied forces? Why? Why was it important that the messages were decoded?*

Explain that a group of mathematicians and code breakers, including Alan

Turing, were employed at Bletchley Park to break the German codes sent and received by the machines. Allied monitoring stations picked up every message but until the codes were broken, there was no way of knowing what they said. An added challenge was that the codes changed every two days. You can use the books *The Secret Life of Spies* by Michael Noble and Alexander Mostov (Wide Eyed Editions); *The Bletchley Riddle* by Ruta Sepetys and Steve Sheinkin; *I Spy: A Bletchley Park Mystery*, and *Little People, Big Dreams: Alan Turing* to provide background information to support learning and immersion. You could also provide a



“Allied monitoring stations picked up every message but until the codes were broken, there was no way of knowing what they said”

fact-file to support this introduction to the historical context, but an online search will provide the necessary background knowledge.

2 | MAP WORK

Reintroduce the map from the starter activity. Explain that the map and mission are fictional, but the importance of decoding the machine is heavily based on truth. Within the base shown on the map is an Enigma machine that the team at Bletchley has been unable to decipher. Tell pupils that they will take on the role of spies, who have been sent to infiltrate the base (via a pre-dug tunnel that provides entry into a storeroom), journey through the rooms and spaces without being

seen, and use distractions when guards or guard dogs are present. The mission should not include any physical altercation; stealth is the operative word, and imagination is the tool!

Provide the children with an A3 version of the map. How do they think they might reach the Enigma machine without being discovered? Guide them to work in pairs to plan a route through the base to the machine. Consider how this will be navigated safely, the kinds of distractions that could be used, and how different surfaces (carpet, floorboards, stone, gravel) may provide a safer, or alternatively, more dangerous passage. Scaffold

with questions such as, *How would you move? How could you distract, considering items in the rooms you are moving through?*

3 | MISSION: POSSIBLE

Ask pupils to write down the sequence they've selected for movement through the base. This sequence will eventually, with further review and discussion, provide their paragraph structure for their full narrative piece.

Next, use the Detail Detectives strategy ‘Jig-Saw’ (see a full explanation at mrdht.wordpress.com), to develop the vocabulary the children will need for their narrative writing. Create a 4 x 2 grid on the classroom floor with masking tape, and label each square with a room name from the base.

Provide the children with the words *walk, hide, crawl, slide*. Consider synonyms for the words, to place into the appropriate square on the floor relating to each room.

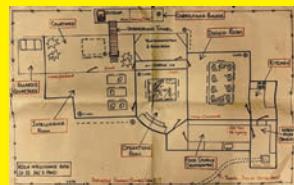
Passage through the base could be repetitive, and we need a wide range of vocabulary relating to movement, so this is the opportunity to collect a variety of words. Guide the children to combine this vocabulary with their sequence of movement and knowledge of sentence-building, to write a narrative explanation of their journey through the base. Can they create a suspenseful piece of writing without it becoming repetitive?

Karl Duke is headteacher of a school in Lincolnshire. He is passionate about the power of picture books to inspire learning across the curriculum.

EXTENDING THE LESSON

- The English language is ripe with synonyms; can the children describe their journey using new words that have the same – or a similar – effect?
- Encourage those who finish quickly or show a particular interest to try and provide an alternative route in response to intelligence updates (e.g. that a certain room has lost light, or a light is now turned on, or a guard has moved to a different position or room. There may be a change of guards, which opens up seconds of time to move). This intelligence could be received in Morse code or in a handwritten code for the children to decipher.

teachwire



Download your free printable map at

tinyurl.com/tp-EnigmaLesson

USEFUL QUESTIONS

- How did countries find out about what their enemies were planning?
- Why do we learn about coding in school today?
- What challenges would we face when infiltrating the base?
- Can you think of synonyms for *quiet? Careful? Distraction? Slow?*

MUSICALS

Rapunzel and the Barbershop Bros

A brilliantly resourced KS2 musical that saves teachers time while giving children an unforgettable performance experience

Out of the Ark Music



AT A GLANCE

- Full script, MP3s, lyrics, scores and Words on Screen option
- Cast list organised by speaking part size for easy allocation
- Clear staging, costume and props guidance
- Tick box prop lists for simple organisation
- Suggested choreography included for key songs

REVIEWED BY: EMMA THOMPSON



Putting on a KS2 production is exciting, but let's be honest, it can also feel like a logistical nightmare. Casting, script choices, rehearsals, props, costumes, music... it all adds up fast. That is why I was so impressed with Out of the Ark's new musical, *Rapunzel and the Barbershop Bros.* It gives you the full package in one place, with the kind of support that makes you think, "Oh good, someone has already done the hard work for me".

This version of Rapunzel is written specifically for KS2 and based on the traditional tale, but with plenty of fresh twists. The resource comes with everything you need: a fully written script, full MP3s of every song – both with singers and as backing tracks – all of the lyrics, plus really clear lists for costumes and props. You can use the printed book and CD, or go for the Words on Screen format, which is so convenient if you want the words up on the interactive whiteboard while you teach a hall full of children.

The cast list is one of my favourite features. Parts are grouped into very large, large, medium, small and non-speaking roles, which makes it much easier to match children to characters that suit their confidence levels. There is guidance on how to increase or reduce the cast size too, so whether you are working with one class or several, you are not left guessing. It feels very inclusive and frees you up to focus on working with the children rather than rewriting the script.

Staging, props and costumes are all supported in the same practical way. There are suggestions

for how to show Rapunzel in her tower and ideas for simple backdrops that will work in a school hall. Every prop is listed, with little tick boxes so you can keep track of what has been sourced or made. Costume suggestions are realistic and achievable, which is very helpful if parents and carers are involved in putting outfits together.

Then there are the songs, which are outstanding. They drive the story along and are unbelievably catchy. *A Crazy Rumour* is the one that lodged itself in my head, full of building whispers and gossip that children will love performing. *Catch of the Day* has tongue-in-cheek pirate fun that will definitely land with the adults in the audience, while *Somewhere Out There* brings real emotional weight and should be a genuine lump-in-the-throat moment on the night. Out of the Ark even provides suggested choreography, which is such a thoughtful addition. The moves for *To Be a King!* are simple yet effective, while the ideas for *Salon Secrets!* are full of character, and I can already picture how brilliant they will look when performed on stage.

The script itself is exactly what you would hope for from Out of the Ark: funny, warm and full of heart. There are plenty of jokes for children, but also some clever lines and modern touches that will make the grown-ups smile too. It is a genuinely high-quality production that makes life easier for teachers while giving children a show they can be proud of.

teach
PRIMARY

VERDICT

- ✓ A ready to use resource that saves teachers' valuable time
- ✓ Flexible cast structure with roles for every child
- ✓ Standout songs that children love performing
- ✓ Clear staging guidance that takes the stress out of planning
- ✓ A funny, heartfelt script with great moments for the whole audience

YOU'LL LOVE THIS IF ...

You want a KS2 musical that is simple to run, full of charm and energy, and gives your class a polished performance they will remember for a long time.

MEDIA LITERACY

Media & Information Literacy TeachKit

A toolkit to instil essential life skills in your pupils

AT A GLANCE

- From a leading source of news and news-based learning for children
- Free frameworks created with the Media and Information Literacy Alliance (MILA)
- Schemes of work that slot easily into your timetable
- Teaching packs connected to real, up-to-date news stories
- Editable and adaptable
- Designed to help students become lifelong media interpreters



REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL

In a world where anyone can publish anything, our pupils are growing up surrounded by information that is constant, chaotic, and not always credible. They are exposed to news, opinions, and online content from an ever-widening range of sources – including those created or influenced by AI.

Teaching 'the news' is a minefield, so teachers need reliable, tried-and-trusted resources that safeguard against misinformation while equipping students with the critical literacy skills to question, evaluate, and navigate the media landscape with confidence.

First News has created a new resource tailored for KS2 and KS3, rooted in the Media and Information Literacy Alliance's (MILA) five aspirations (be informed, be empowered, be healthy, be socially conscious, be connected) and shaped by Bournemouth University's theory of change for media literacy.

The First News MIL Frameworks set out the essential knowledge and foundational skills young people need to thrive in today's information society. Each aspiration is supported by *I know/I can* statements that make media and information literacy explicit. These are systematically addressed through TeachKit schemes of work, with clear learning objectives across the year and fortnightly news-based lessons mapped back to the framework for coherence and continuity.

An impressive collection of related resources on topical news items are there to download including lesson plans, teaching slides and parent guides with additional resources such as vocabulary cards, scenario cards, sorting cards, worksheets, and templates. Taken together, these resources form a powerful package that helps students move far beyond the headline – encouraging them to dig deeper, question

sources, analyse meaning, and develop genuine critical thinking.

Every lesson plan is thoughtfully put together, with guidance to help teachers navigate sensitive or 'hot topic' content with care. Clear learning objectives are set out from the start, and all the media and information literacy (MIL) links are made explicit so you can see exactly how each lesson builds your students' skills. Lessons follow a balanced format, blending starter activities, reading, discussion, creative production, and reflection. Editable PowerPoint slides are included, giving you the flexibility to adapt and tailor the content to your own context and learners. A downloadable parent guide accompanies each lesson, featuring "Ask me what I learnt today" prompts to spark meaningful conversations at home.

The MIL TeachKit is intuitive and user-friendly, giving you instant access to your downloads, saved lessons, and any resources you've created. You can personalise your dashboard so it's tailored to the yeargroups and subjects you teach, while also tracking your school's network activity. Quick links make it easy to jump straight to the resources you need, and you can seamlessly toggle between expert-written and community-crafted lessons and packs. One of the standout features is the built-in AI tool, which enables you to create high-quality lessons in just two minutes and that's a real game-changer for busy teachers.

Students need news they can trust – and First News MIL equips them with the essential life skills to become confident, media- and information-savvy citizens. This TeachKit will provide teachers with impactful tools to help support students to question, analyse, and reflect on every form of media they encounter, use, and create.

FirstNews
TeachKit
Media & Information Literacy

MIL

teach PRIMARY

VERDICT

- ✓ Supports students to engage with media and information in healthy, critical, and active ways
- ✓ Encourages students to go from being consumers to interrogators of news and information
- ✓ Empowers young citizens to form informed views and participate fully in society
- ✓ Develops critical thinking so students can make balanced, evidence-based judgements about the information they encounter and use
- ✓ Provides a complete package for building media-savvy classrooms

UPGRADE IF...

You are looking for practical, ready-to-use tools that bring media literacy to life and help your students look past the headlines, explore issues in depth, and develop the critical skills they need to question, analyse, and make sense of the world around them.

Q & A

We take the famous Proust questionnaire and pose eight of its questions to a fellow educator. Take a peek into the deepest depths of a teacher's soul...

1 What is your idea of perfect happiness in your job?

Pride! I love it when children demonstrate real joy in something they have achieved. Those golden moments when they come to show me a piece of learning that they are proud of, when they punch the air upon receipt of a certificate in assembly, or when they take that extra time and care to produce something special. As deputy head, I find real happiness in how proud our team are of their professional achievements, too, and the pride they show for our children and our special little school community.

2 What is your greatest fear at work?

Failure. I'm a self-confessed perfectionist and control freak, and unfortunately that means I perceive personal failure whenever something I have set my mind to doesn't go to plan. From the small things like a display not turning out as intended, to the failure I feel when I have let a pupil down through not supporting them effectively with their learning or wellbeing. Whilst I know failure leads to lessons learned (I've certainly told the children that enough times over the years!), I can't help that personal sense of disappointment when I haven't managed to achieve what I set out to.

3 What is your current state of mind?

FRAZZLED! It's coming to the end of a long and busy autumn term as I write this, and I am wearing many hats at the moment. Luckily, I love what I do and I can rock a hat! But I must admit that those long lie-ins and mince pies are now calling my name.

4 What do you consider the most overrated teacher virtue?

Patience... I've been told many times over the years by friends and family that I must have the patience of a saint to do what I do. It's all an act; I should be nominated for an Oscar not a Sainthood! A busy school where no two days are the same certainly does require patience and resilience, but it is not a quality I can maintain all of the time. That burnout feeling can certainly hit on the journey home when you've been playing a part all day. But, of course, the next morning you paint on that smile and go again!

5 On what occasion do you lie to your class?

ALL. THE. TIME. Let's be honest, how many times have teachers said to the children, "Let's check the CCTV" to get to the bottom of a conflict? I also love the magical little lies you can tell younger children to hook their imagination – that 'mystery giant egg' that has appeared in class overnight, or the unexplained footsteps leading to the book corner. Whilst I preach the importance of honesty to the children, there are certainly many occasions when a little lie can spark some curiosity and enthusiasm for learning.

6 Which words or phrases do you most overuse with your class?

This is a tough one. I have a few stock phrases that I like to use to remind the children I'm human and to keep the mood light and spirits high. I can often be heard saying "Let's rock 'n' roll" when we are about to crack on with something and need to focus. I think humour can be the best tool in a teacher's toolkit to diffuse

situations, cheer children up or motivate them to learn.

7 What do you consider your greatest teaching achievement?

I find this incredibly difficult to put my finger on, I must be honest. I think the joy of teaching is in the little wins that happen every day. From that moment you get a smile on the grumpiest little face to the cracking Estyn report you know your school and staff deserve. I think achievement in teaching comes not from your personal successes but those that are achieved by your pupils, colleagues and school as a whole.

8 What is your most treasured teaching possession?

Big teacher scissors! Where do they all go? Have you ever tried cutting thick cardboard or felt with those little pupil scissors? But, beyond the everyday objects, my most treasured possession has to be positivity. Whether you're feeling positive or not on the inside, I'm a big believer of the 'fake it till you make it' mentality. It helps breed a positive atmosphere where everyone has a sense of togetherness and a 'can do' attitude.



NAME: Nansi Lambert

JOB ROLE: Deputy headteacher, Sofrydd Primary School

EXTRA INFO: In 2025, Estyn said: "Sofrydd is a welcoming, inclusive school that values pupils and staff and ensures that they can thrive".



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